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*Collected Poems*

*H. D.*



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*Collected Poems*  
*of*  
*H. D.*



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*SEA GARDEN*



# SEA GARDEN

## SEA ROSE

ROSE, harsh rose,  
marred and with stint of petals,  
meagre flower, thin,  
sparse of leaf,

more precious  
than a wet rose  
single on a stem—  
you are caught in the drift.

Stunted, with small-leaf,  
you are flung on the sand,  
you are lifted  
in the crisp sand  
that drives in the wind.

Can the spice-rose  
drip such acrid fragrance  
hardened in a leaf?

## THE HELMSMAN

O<sub>x</sub>BE swift—

we have always known you wanted us.

We fled inland with our flocks,  
we pastured them in hollows,  
cut off from the wind  
and the salt track of the marsh.

We worshipped inland—  
we stepped past wood-flowers,  
we forgot your tang,  
we brushed wood-grass.

We wandered from pine-hills  
through oak and scrub-oak tangles,  
we broke hyssop and bramble,  
we caught flower and new bramble-fruit  
in our hair: we laughed  
as each branch whipped back,  
we tore our feet in half buried rocks  
and knotted roots and acorn-cups.

We forgot—we worshipped,  
we parted green from green,

we sought further thickets,  
we dipped our ankles  
through leaf-mould and earth,  
and wood and wood-bank enchanted us—

and the feel of the clefts in the bark,  
and the slope between tree and tree—  
and a slender path strung field to field  
and wood to wood  
and hill to hill  
and the forest after it.

We forgot—for a moment  
tree-resin, tree-bark,  
sweat of a torn branch  
were sweet to the taste.

We were enchanted with the fields,  
the tufts of coarse grass  
in the shorter grass—  
we loved all this.

But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—  
drops—  
climbs—hesitates—crawls back—  
climbs—hesitates—  
O be swift—  
we have always known you wanted us.

## THE SHRINE

(“SHE WATCHES OVER THE SEA”)

### I

ARE your rocks shelter for ships—  
have you sent galleys from your beach,  
are you graded—a safe crescent—  
where the tide lifts them back to port—  
are you full and sweet,  
tempting the quiet  
to depart in their trading ships?

Nay, you are great, fierce, evil—  
you are the land-blight—  
you have tempted men  
but they perished on your cliffs.

Your lights are but dank shoals,  
slate and pebble and wet shells  
and seaweed fastened to the rocks.

It was evil—evil  
when they found you,

when the quiet men looked at you—  
they sought a headland  
shaded with ledge of cliff  
from the wind-blast.

But you—you are unsheltered,  
cut with the weight of wind—  
you shudder when it strikes,  
then lift, swelled with the blast—  
you sink as the tide sinks,  
you shrill under hail, and sound  
thunder when thunder sounds.

You are useless—  
when the tides swirl  
your boulders cut and wreck  
the staggering ships.

## II

You are useless,  
O grave, O beautiful,  
the landsmen tell it—I have heard—  
you are useless.

And the wind sounds with this  
and the sea  
where rollers shot with blue  
cut under deeper blue.

O but stay tender, enchanted  
where wave-lengths cut you  
apart from all the rest—  
for we have found you,  
we watch the splendour of you,  
we thread throat on throat of freesia  
for your shelf.

You are not forgot,  
O plunder of lilies,  
honey is not more sweet  
than the salt stretch of your beach.

### III

Stay—stay—  
but terror has caught us now,  
we passed the men in ships,  
we dared deeper than the fisher-folk  
and you strike us with terror  
O bright shaft.

Flame passes under us  
and sparks that unknot the flesh,  
sorrow, splitting bone from bone,  
splendour athwart our eyes  
and rifts in the splendour,  
sparks and scattered light.



Many warned of this,  
men said:  
there are wrecks on the fore-beach,  
wind will beat your ship,  
there is no shelter in that headland,  
it is useless waste, that edge,  
that front of rock—  
sea-gulls clang beyond the breakers,  
none venture to that spot.

#### IV

But hail—  
as the tide slackens,  
as the wind beats out,  
we hail this shore—  
we sing to you,  
spirit between the headlands  
and the further rocks.

Though oak-beams split,  
though boats and sea-men flounder,  
and the strait grind sand with sand  
and cut boulders to sand and drift—

your eyes have pardoned our faults,  
your hands have touched us—  
you have leaned forward a little  
and the waves can never thrust us back  
from the splendour of your ragged coast.

## MID-DAY

THE light beats upon me.  
I am startled—  
a split leaf crackles on the paved floor—  
I am anguished—defeated.

A slight wind shakes the seed-pods—  
my thoughts are spent  
as the black seeds.  
My thoughts tear me,  
I dread their fever.  
I am scattered in its whirl.  
I am scattered like  
the hot shrivelled seeds.

The shrivelled seeds  
are split on the path—  
the grass bends with dust,  
the grape slips  
under its crackled leaf:  
yet far beyond the spent seed-pods,  
and the blackened stalks of mint,  
the poplar is bright on the hill,

the poplar spreads out,  
deep-rooted among trees.

O poplar, you are great  
among the hill-stones,  
while I perish on the path  
among the crevices of the rocks.

## PURSUIT

WHAT do I care  
that the stream is trampled,  
the sand on the stream-bank  
still holds the print of your foot:  
the heel is cut deep.  
I see another mark  
on the grass ridge of the bank—  
it points toward the wood-path.  
I have lost the third  
in the packed earth.

But here  
a wild-hyacinth stalk is snapped:  
the purple buds—half ripe—  
show deep purple  
where your heel pressed.

A patch of flowering grass,  
low, trailing—  
you brushed this:  
the green stems show yellow-green  
where you lifted—turned the earth-side

to the light?  
this and a dead leaf-spine,  
split across,  
show where you passed.

You were swift, swift!  
here the forest ledge slopes—  
rain has furrowed the roots.  
Your hand caught at this;  
the root snapped under your weight.

I can almost follow the note  
where it touched this slender tree  
and the next answered—  
and the next.

And you climbed yet further!  
you stopped by the dwarf-cornel—  
whirled on your heels,  
doubled on your track.

This is clear—  
you fell on the downward slope,  
you dragged a bruised thigh—you limped—  
you clutched this larch.

Did your head, bent back,  
search further—  
clear through the green leaf-moss  
of the larch branches?

Did you clutch,  
stammer with short breath and gasp:  
*wood-daemons grant life—*  
*give life—I am almost lost.*

For some wood-daemon  
has lightened your steps.  
I can find no trace of you  
in the larch-cones and the underbrush.

## THE CONTEST

### I

YOUR stature is modelled  
with straight tool-edge:  
you are chiselled like rocks  
that are eaten into by the sea.

With the turn and grasp of your wrist  
and the chords' stretch,  
there is a glint like worn brass.

The ridge of your breast is taut,  
and under each the shadow is sharp,  
and between the clenched muscles  
of your slender hips.

From the circle of your cropped hair  
there is light,  
and about your male torso  
and the foot-arch and the straight ankle.

### II

You stand rigid and mighty—  
granite and the ore in rocks;

a great band clasps your forehead  
and its heavy twists of gold.

You are white—a limb of cypress  
bent under a weight of snow.

You are splendid,  
your arms are fire;  
you have entered the hill-straits—  
a sea treads upon the hill-slopes.

### III

Myrtle is about your head,  
you have bent and caught the spray:  
each leaf is sharp  
against the lift and furrow  
of your bound hair.

The narcissus has copied the arch  
of your slight breast:  
your feet are citron-flowers,  
your knees, cut from white-ash,  
your thighs are rock-cistus.

Your chin lifts straight  
from the hollow of your curved throat.  
your shoulders are level—  
they have melted rare silver  
for their breadth.



## SEA LILY

REED,  
slashed and torn  
but doubly rich—  
such great heads as yours  
drift upon temple-steps,  
but you are shattered  
in the wind.

Myrtle-bark  
is flecked from you,  
scales are dashed  
from your stem,  
sand cuts your petal,  
furrows it with hard-edge,  
like flint  
on a bright stone.

Yet though the whole wind  
slash at your bark,  
you are lifted up,  
aye—though it hiss  
to cover you with froth.

## THE WIND SLEEPERS

WHITER  
than the crust  
left by the tide,  
we are stung by the hurled sand  
and the broken shells.

We no longer sleep  
in the wind—  
we awoke and fled  
through the city gate.

Tear—  
tear us an altar,  
tug at the cliff-boulders,  
pile them with the rough stones—  
we no longer  
sleep in the wind,  
propitiate us.

Chant in a wail  
that never halts,  
pace a circle and pay tribute  
with a song.

When the roar of a dropped wave  
breaks into it,  
pour meted words  
of sea-hawks and gulls  
and sea-birds that cry  
discords.

## THE GIFT

INSTEAD of pearls—a wrought clasp—  
a bracelet—will you accept this?

You know the script—  
you will start, wonder:  
what is left, what phrase  
after last night? This:

The world is yet unspoiled for you,  
you wait, expectant—  
you are like the children  
who haunt your own steps  
for chance bits—a comb  
that may have slipped,  
a gold tassel, unravelled,  
plucked from your scarf,  
twirled by your slight fingers  
into the street—  
a flower dropped.

Do not think me unaware,  
I who have snatched at you  
as the street-child clutched

at the seed-pearls you spilt  
that hot day  
when your necklace snapped.

Do not dream that I speak  
as one defrauded of delight,  
sick, shaken by each heart-beat  
or paralyzed, stretched at length,  
who gasps:  
these ripe pears  
are bitter to the taste,  
this spiced wine, poison, corrupt.  
I cannot walk—  
who would walk?  
Life is a scavenger's pit—I escape—  
I only, rejecting it,  
lying here on this couch.

Your garden sloped to the beach,  
myrtle overran the paths,  
honey and amber flecked each leaf,  
the citron-lily head—  
one among many—  
weighed there, over-sweet.

The myrrh-hyacinth  
spread across low slopes,  
violets streaked black ridges  
through the grass.

The house, too, was like this,  
over painted, over lovely—  
the world is like this.

Sleepless nights,  
I remember the initiates,  
their gesture, their calm glance.  
I have heard how in rapt thought,  
in vision, they speak  
with another race,  
more beautiful, more intense than this.  
I could laugh—  
more beautiful, more intense?

Perhaps that other life  
is contrast always to this.  
I reason:  
I have lived as they  
in their inmost rites—  
they endure the tense nerves  
through the moment of ritual.  
I endure from moment to moment—  
days pass all alike,  
tortured, intense.

This I forgot last night:  
you must not be blamed,  
it is not your fault;  
as a child, a flower—any flower

tore my breast—  
meadow-chicory, a common grass-tip,  
a leaf shadow, a flower tint  
unexpected on a winter-branch.

I reason:  
another life holds what this lacks,  
a sea, unmoving, quiet—  
not forcing our strength  
to rise to it, beat on beat—  
a stretch of sand,  
no garden beyond, strangling  
with its myrrh-lilies—  
a hill, not set with black violets  
but stones, stones, bare rocks,  
dwarf-trees, twisted, no beauty  
to distract—to crowd  
madness upon madness.

Only a still place  
and perhaps some outer-horror  
some hideousness to stamp beauty,  
a mark—no changing it now—  
on our hearts.

I send no string of pearls,  
no bracelet—accept this.

## EVENING

THE light passes  
from ridge to ridge;  
from flower to flower—  
the hypaticas, wide-spread  
under the light  
grow faint—  
the petals reach inward,  
the blue tips bend  
toward the bluer heart  
and the flowers are lost.

The cornel-buds are still white,  
but shadows dart  
from the cornel-roots—  
black creeps from root to root,  
each leaf  
cuts another leaf on the grass,  
shadow seeks shadow,  
then both leaf  
and leaf-shadow are lost.



## SHELTERED GARDEN

I HAVE had enough.

I gasp for breath.

Every way ends, every road,  
every foot-path leads at last  
to the hill-crest—  
then you retrace your steps,  
or find the same slope on the other side,  
precipitate.

I have had enough—  
border-pinks, clove-pinks, wax-lilies,  
herbs, sweet-cress.

O for some sharp swish of a branch—  
there is no scent of resin  
in this place,  
no taste of bark, of coarse weeds,  
aromatic, astringent—  
only border on border of scented pinks.

Have you seen fruit under cover  
that wanted light—

pears wadded in cloth,  
protected from the frost,  
melons, almost ripe,  
smothered in straw?

Why not let the pears cling  
to the empty branch?  
All your coaxing will only make  
a bitter fruit—  
let them cling, ripen of themselves,  
test their own worth,  
nipped, shrivelled by the frost,  
to fall at last but fair  
with a russet coat.

Or the melon—  
let it bleach yellow  
in the winter light,  
even tart to the taste—  
it is better to taste of frost—  
the exquisite frost—  
than of wadding and of dead grass.

For this beauty,  
beauty without strength,  
chokes out life.  
I want wind to break,  
scatter these pink-stalks,  
snap off their spiced heads,

fling them about with dead leaves—  
spread the paths with twigs,  
limbs broken off,  
trail great pine branches,  
hurled from some far wood  
right across the melon-patch,  
break pear and quince—  
leave half-trees, torn, twisted  
but showing the fight was valiant.

O to blot out this garden  
to forget, to find a new beauty  
in some terrible  
wind-tortured place.

## SEA POPPIES

AMBER husk  
fluted with gold,  
fruit on the sand  
marked with a rich grain,

treasure  
spilled near the shrub-pines  
to bleach on the boulders:

your stalk has caught root  
among wet pebbles  
and drift flung by the sea  
and grated shells  
and split conch-shells.

Beautiful, wide-spread,  
fire upon leaf,  
what meadow yields  
so fragrant a leaf  
as your bright leaf?

## LOSS

THE sea called—  
you faced the estuary,  
you were drowned as the tide passed.—  
I am glad of this—  
at least you have escaped.

The heavy sea-mist stifles me.  
I choke with each breath—  
a curious peril, this—  
the gods have invented  
curious torture for us.

One of us, pierced in the flank,  
dragged himself across the marsh,  
he tore at the bay-roots,  
lost hold on the crumbling bank—

Another crawled—too late—  
for shelter under the cliffs.

I am glad the tide swept you out,  
O beloved,

you of all this ghastly host  
alone untouched,  
your white flesh covered with salt  
as with myrrh and burnt iris.

We were hemmed in this place,  
so few of us, so few of us to fight  
their sure lances,  
the straight thrust—effortless  
with slight life of muscle and shoulder.

So straight—only we were left,  
the four of us—somehow shut off.  
And the marsh dragged one back,  
and another perished under the cliff,  
and the tide swept you out.

Your feet cut steel on the paths,  
I followed for the strength  
of life and grasp.  
I have seen beautiful feet  
but never beauty welded with strength.  
I marvelled at your height.

You stood almost level  
with the lance-bearers  
and so slight.

And I wondered as you clasped  
your shoulder-strap  
at the strength of your wrist  
and the turn of your young fingers,  
and the lift of your shorn locks,  
and the bronze  
of your sun-burnt neck.

All of this,  
and the curious knee-cap,  
fitted above the wrought greaves,  
and the sharp muscles of your back  
which the tunic could not cover—  
the outline  
no garment could deface.

I wonder if you knew how I watched,  
how I crowded before the spearsmen—  
but the gods wanted you,  
the gods wanted you back.

## HUNTRESS

COME, blunt your spear with us,  
our pace is hot  
and our bare heels  
in the heel-prints—  
we stand tense—do you see—  
are you already beaten  
by the chase?

We lead the pace  
for the wind on the hills,  
the low hill is spattered  
with loose earth—  
our feet cut into the crust  
as with spears.

We climbed the ploughed land,  
dragged the seed from the clefts,  
broke the clods with our heels,  
whirled with a parched cry  
into the woods:

*Can you come,  
can you come,*



*can you follow the hound trail,  
can you trample the hot froth?*

Spring up—sway forward—  
follow the quickest one,  
aye, though you leave the trail  
and drop exhausted at our feet.

## GARDEN

### I

YOU are clear  
O rose, cut in rock,  
hard as the descent of hail.

I could scrape the colour  
from the petals,  
like split dye from a rock.

If I could break you  
I could break a tree.

If I could stir  
I could break a tree—  
I could break you.

### II

O wind, rend open the heat,  
cut apart the heat,  
rend it to tatters.

Fruit cannot drop  
through this thick air—  
fruit cannot fall into heat  
that presses up and blunts  
the points of pears  
and rounds the grapes.

Cut the heat—  
plough through it,  
turning it on either side  
of your path.

## SEA VIOLET

THE white violet  
is scented on its stalk,  
the sea-violet  
fragile as agate,  
lies fronting all the wind  
among the torn shells  
on the sand-bank.

The greater blue violets  
flutter on the hill,  
but who would change for these  
who would change for these  
one root of the white sort?

Violet  
your grasp is frail  
on the edge of the sand-hill,  
but you catch the light—  
frost, a star edges with its fire.

## THE CLIFF TEMPLE

### I

GREAT, bright portal,  
shelf of rock,  
rocks fitted in long ledges,  
rocks fitted to dark, to silver granite,  
to lighter rock—  
clean cut, white against white.

High—high—and no hill-goat  
tramples—no mountain-sheep  
has set foot on your fine grass;  
you lift, you are the world-edge,  
pillar for the sky-arch.

The world heaved—  
we are next to the sky:  
over us, sea-hawks shout,  
gulls sweep past—  
the terrible breakers are silent  
from this place.

Below us, on the rock-edge,  
where earth is caught in the fissures

of the jagged cliff,  
a small tree stiffens in the gale,  
it bends—but its white flowers  
are fragrant at this height.

And under and under,  
the wind booms:  
it whistles, it thunders,  
it grows—it presses the grass  
beneath its great feet.

## II

I said:  
for ever and for ever, must I follow you  
through the stones?  
I catch at you—you lurch:  
you are quicker than my hand-grasp.

I wondered at you.  
I shouted—dear—mysterious—beautiful—  
white myrtle-flesh.

I was splintered and torn:  
the hill-path mounted  
swifter than my feet.

Could a daemon avenge this hurt,  
I would cry to him—could a ghost,

I would shout—O evil,  
follow this god,  
taunt him with his evil and his vice.

### III

Shall I hurl myself from here,  
shall I leap and be nearer you?  
Shall I drop, beloved, beloved,  
ankle against ankle?  
Would you pity me, O white breast?

If I woke, would you pity me,  
would our eyes meet?

Have you heard,  
do you know how I climbed this rock?  
My breath caught, I lurched forward—  
I stumbled in the ground-myrtle.

Have you heard, O god seated on the cliff,  
how far toward the ledges of your house,  
how far I had to walk?

### IV

Over me the wind swirls.  
I have stood on your portal  
and I know—  
you are further than this,  
still further on another cliff.

## ORCHARD

I SAW the first pear  
as it fell—  
the honey-seeking, golden-banded,  
the yellow swarm  
was not more fleet than I,  
(spare us from loveliness)  
and I fell prostrate  
crying:  
you have flayed us  
with your blossoms,  
spare us the beauty  
of fruit-trees.

The honey-seeking  
paused not,  
the air thundered their song,  
and I alone was prostrate.

O rough-hewn  
god of the orchard,  
I bring you an offering—  
do you, alone unbeautiful,



son of the god,  
spare us from loveliness:

these fallen hazel-nuts,  
stripped late of their green sheaths,  
grapes, red-purple,  
their berries  
dripping with wine,  
pomegranates already broken,  
and shrunken figs  
and quinces untouched,  
I bring you as offering.

## SEA GODS

### I

THEY say there is no hope—  
sand—drift—rocks—rubble of the sea—  
the broken hulk of a ship,  
hung with shreds of rope,  
pallid under the cracked pitch.

they say there is no hope  
to conjure you—  
no whip of the tongue to anger you—  
no hate of words  
you must rise to refute.

They say you are twisted by the sea,  
you are cut apart  
by wave-break upon wave-break,  
that you are misshapen by the sharp rocks,  
broken by the rasp and after-rasp.

That you are cut, torn, mangled,  
torn by the stress and beat,  
no stronger than the strips of sand  
along your ragged beach.

## II

But we bring violets,  
great masses—single, sweet,  
wood-violets, stream-violets,  
violets from a wet marsh.

Violets in clumps from hills,  
tufts with earth at the roots,  
violets tugged from rocks,  
blue violets, moss, cliff, river-violets.

Yellow violets' gold,  
burnt with a rare tint—  
violets like red ash  
among tufts of grass.

We bring deep-purple  
bird-foot violets.

We bring the hyacinth-violet,  
sweet, bare, chill to the touch—  
and violets whiter than the in-rush  
of your own white surf.

## III

For you will come,  
you will yet haunt men in ships,

you will trail across the fringe of strait  
and circle the jagged rocks.

You will trail across the rocks  
and wash them with your salt,  
you will curl between sand-hills—  
you will thunder along the cliff—  
break—retreat—get fresh strength—  
gather and pour weight upon the beach.

You will draw back,  
and the ripple on the sand-shelf  
will be witness of your track.  
O privet-white, you will paint  
the lintel of wet sand with froth.

You will bring myrrh-bark  
and drift laurel-wood from hot coasts!  
when you hurl high—high—  
we will answer with a shout.

For you will come,  
you will come,  
you will answer our taut hearts,  
you will break the lie of men's thoughts,  
and cherish and shelter us.

## ACON

### I

BEAR me to Dictæus,  
and to the steep slopes;  
to the river Erymanthus.

I choose spray of dittany,  
cyperum, frail of flower,  
buds of myrrh,  
all-healing herbs,  
close pressed in calathes.

For she lies panting,  
drawing sharp breath,  
broken with harsh sobs,  
she, Hyella,  
whom no god pities.

### II

Dryads  
haunting the groves,  
nereids

who dwell in wet caves,  
for all the white leaves of olive-branch,  
and early roses,  
and ivy wreaths, woven gold berries,  
which she once brought to your altars,  
bear now ripe fruits from Arcadia,  
and Assyrian wine  
to shatter her fever.

The light of her face falls from its flower,  
as a hyacinth,  
hidden in a far valley,  
perishes upon burnt grass.

Pales,  
bring gifts,  
bring your Phoenician stuffs,  
and do you, fleet-footed nymphs,  
bring offerings,  
Illyrian iris,  
and a branch of shrub,  
and frail-headed poppies.

## NIGHT

THE night has cut  
each from each  
and curled the petals  
back from the stalk  
and under it in crisp rows;

under at an unfaltering pace,  
under till the rinds break,  
back till each bent leaf  
is parted from its stalk;

under at a grave pace,  
under till the leaves  
are bent back  
till they drop upon earth,  
back till they are all broken.

O night,  
you take the petals  
of the roses in your hand,  
but leave the stark core  
of the rose  
to perish on the branch.

## PRISONERS

It is strange that I should want  
this sight of your face—  
we have had so much:  
at any moment now I may pass,  
stand near the gate,  
do not speak—  
only reach if you can, your face  
half-fronting the passage  
toward the light.

Fate—God sends this as a mark,  
a last token that we are not forgot,  
lost in this turmoil,  
about to be crushed out,  
burned or stamped out  
at best with sudden death.

The spearsman who brings this  
will ask for the gold clasp  
you wear under your coat.  
I gave all I had left.



Press close to the portal,  
my gate will soon clang  
and your fellow wretches  
will crowd to the entrance—  
be first at the gate.

Ah beloved, do not speak.  
I write this in great haste—  
do not speak,  
you may yet be released.

I am glad enough to depart  
though I have never tasted life  
as in these last weeks.

It is a strange life,  
patterned in fire and letters  
on the prison pavement.  
If I glance up  
it is written on the walls,  
it is cut on the floor,  
it is patterned across  
the slope of the roof.

I am weak—weak—  
last night if the guard  
had left the gate unlocked  
I could not have ventured to escape,  
but one thought serves me now  
with strength.

As I pass down the corridor  
past desperate faces at each cell,  
your eyes and my eyes may meet.

You will be dark, unkempt,  
but I pray for one glimpse of your face—  
why do I want this?

I who have seen you at the banquet  
each flower of your hyacinth-circlet  
white against your hair.

Why do I want this,  
when even last night  
you startled me from sleep?  
You stood against the dark rock,  
you grasped an elder staff.

So many nights  
you have distracted me from terror.  
Once you lifted a spear-flower.  
I remember how you stooped  
to gather it—  
and it flamed, the leaf and shoot  
and the threads, yellow, yellow—  
sheer till they burnt  
to red-purple in the cup.

As I pass your cell-door  
do not speak.

I was first on the list—  
they may forget you tried to shield me  
as the horsemen passed.

## STORM

YOU crash over the trees,  
you crack the live branch—  
the branch is white,  
the green crushed,  
each leaf is rent like split wood.

You burden the trees  
with black drops,  
you swirl and crash—  
you have broken off a weighted leaf  
in the wind,  
it is hurled out,  
whirls up and sinks,  
a green stone.

## SEA IRIS

### I

WEED, moss-weed,  
root tangled in sand,  
sea-iris, brittle flower,  
one petal like a shell  
is broken,  
and you print a shadow  
like a thin twig.

Fortunate one,  
scented and stinging,  
rigid myrrh-bud,  
camphor-flower,  
sweet and salt—you are wind  
in our nostrils.

### II

Do the murex-fishers  
drench you as they pass?  
Do your roots drag up colour  
from the sand?

Have they slipped gold under you—  
rivets of gold?

Band of iris-flowers  
above the waves,  
you are painted blue,  
painted like a fresh prow  
stained among the salt weeds.

## HERMES OF THE WAYS

THE hard sand breaks,  
and the grains of it  
are clear as wine.

Far off over the leagues of it,  
the wind,  
playing on the wide shore;  
piles little ridges,  
and the great waves  
break over it.

But more than the many-foamed ways  
of the sea,  
I know him  
of the triple path-ways,  
Hermes,  
who awaits.

Dubious,  
facing three ways,  
welcoming wayfarers,  
he whom the sea-orchard  
shelters from the west,

from the east  
weathers sea-wind;  
fronts the great dunes.

Wind rushes  
over the dunes,  
and the coarse, salt-crustcd grass  
answers.

Heu,  
it whips round my ankles!

## II

Small is  
this white stream,  
flowing below ground  
from the poplar-shaded hill,  
but the water is sweet.

Apples on the small trees  
are hard,  
too small,  
too late ripened  
by a desperate sun  
that struggles through sea-mist.

The boughs of the trees  
are twisted



by many bafflings;  
twisted are  
the small-leafed boughs.

But the shadow of them  
is not the shadow of the mast head  
nor of the torn sails.

Hermes, Hermes,  
the great sea foamed,  
gnashed its teeth about me;  
but you have waited,  
where sea-grass tangles with  
shore-grass.

## PEAR TREE

SILVER dust  
lifted from the earth,  
higher than my arms reach,  
you have mounted,  
O silver,  
higher than my arms reach  
you front us with great mass;

no flower ever opened  
so staunch a white leaf,  
no flower ever parted silver  
from such rare silver;

O white pear,  
your flower-tufts  
thick on the branch  
bring summer and ripe fruits  
in their purple hearts.

## CITIES

CAN we believe—by an effort  
comfort our hearts:  
it is not waste all this,  
not placed here in disgust,  
street after street,  
each patterned alike,  
no grace to lighten  
a single house of the hundred  
crowded into one garden-space.

Crowded—can we believe,  
not in utter disgust,  
in ironical play—  
but the maker of cities grew faint  
with the beauty of temple  
and space before temple,  
arch upon perfect arch,  
of pillars and corridors that led out  
to strange court-yards and porches  
where sun-light stamped  
hyacinth-shadows  
black on the pavement.

That the maker of cities grew faint  
with the splendour of palaces,  
paused while the incense-flowers  
from the incense-trees  
dropped on the marble-walk,  
thought anew, fashioned this—  
street after street alike.

For alas,  
he had crowded the city so full  
that men could not grasp beauty,  
beauty was over them,  
through them, about them,  
no crevice unpacked with the honey,  
rare, measureless.

So he built a new city,  
ah can we believe, not ironically  
but for new splendour  
constructed new people  
to lift through slow growth  
to a beauty unrivalled yet—  
and created new cells,  
hideous first, hideous now—  
spread larve across them,  
not honey but seething life

And in these dark cells,  
packed street after street,

souls live, hideous yet—  
O disfigured, defaced,  
with no trace of the beauty  
men once held so light.

Can we think a few old cells  
were left—we are left—  
grains of honey,  
old dust of stray pollen  
dull on our torn wings,  
we are left to recall the old streets?

Is our task the less sweet  
that the larve still sleep in their cells?  
Or crawl out to attack our frail strength:  
You are useless. We live.  
We await great events.  
We are spread through this earth.  
We protect our strong race.  
You are useless.  
Your cell takes the place  
of our young future strength.

Though they sleep or wake to torment  
and wish to displace our old cells—  
thin rare gold—  
that their larve grow fat—  
is our task the less sweet?

Though we wander about,  
find no honey of flowers in this waste,  
is our task the less sweet—  
who recall the old splendour,  
await the new beauty of cities?

*The city is peopled  
with spirits, not ghosts, O my love:*

*Though they crowded between  
and usurped the kiss of my mouth  
their breath was your gift,  
their beauty, your life.*

*THE GOD*





## THE GOD

### I

I ASKED of your face:  
is it dark,  
set beneath heavy locks,  
circled with stiff ivy-fruit,  
clear,  
cut with great hammer-stroke,  
brow, nose and mouth,  
mysterious and far distant  
from my sense.

I asked:  
can he from his portals of ebony  
carved with grapes,  
turn toward the earth?

I even spoke this blasphemy  
in my thoughts:  
the earth is evil,  
given over to evil,  
we are lost.

## II

And in a moment  
you have altered this;

beneath my feet, the rocks  
have no weight  
against the rush of cyclamen,  
fire-tipped, ivory-pointed,  
white;

beneath my feet the flat rocks  
have no strength  
against the deep purple flower-embers,  
cyclamen, wine spilled.

## III

As I stood among the bare rocks  
where salt lay,  
peeled and flaked  
in its white drift,

I thought I would be the last  
you would want,  
I thought I would but scatter salt  
on the ripe grapes.

I thought the vine-leaves  
would curl under,

leaf and leaf-point  
at my touch,

the yellow and green grapes  
would have dropped,  
my very glance must shatter  
the purple fruit.

I had drawn away into the salt,  
myself, a shell  
emptied of life.

#### IV

I pluck the cyclamen,  
red by wine-red,  
and place the petals'  
stiff ivory and bright fire  
against my flesh;

now I am powerless  
to draw back  
for the sea is cyclamen-purple,  
cyclamen-red, colour of the last grapes,  
colour of the purple of the flowers,  
cyclamen-coloured and dark.

## ADONIS

### I

EACH of us like you  
has died once,  
each of us like you  
has passed through drift of wood-leaves,  
cracked and bent  
and tortured and unbent  
in the winter frost,  
then burnt into gold points,  
lighted afresh,  
crisp amber, scales of gold-leaf,  
gold turned and re-welded  
in the sun-heat;

each of us like you  
has died once,  
each of us has crossed an old wood-path  
and found the winter leaves  
so golden in the sun-fire  
that even the live wood-flowers  
were dark.

## II

Not the gold on the temple-front  
where you stand,  
is as gold as this,  
not the gold that fastens your sandal,  
nor the gold reft  
through your chiselled locks  
is as gold as this last year's leaf,  
not all the gold hammered and wrought  
and beaten  
on your lover's face,  
brow and bare breast  
is as golden as this:

each of us like you  
has died once,  
each of us like you  
stands apart, like you  
fit to be worshipped.

## PYGMALION

### I

SHALL I let myself be caught  
in my own light?  
shall I let myself be broken  
in my own heat?  
or shall I cleft the rock as of old  
and break my own fire  
with its surface?

does this fire thwart me  
and my craft,  
or does my work cloud this light?  
which is the god,  
which is the stone  
the god takes for his use?

### II

Which am I,  
the stone or the power  
that lifts the rock from the earth?

am I the master of this fire,  
is this fire my own strength?

am I master of this  
swirl upon swirl of light?  
have I made it as in old times  
I made the gods from the rock?

have I made this fire from myself?  
or is this arrogance?  
is this fire a god  
that seeks me in the dark?

### III

I made image upon image for my use,  
I made image upon image, for the grace  
of Pallas was my flint  
and my help was Hephaestos.

I made god upon god  
step from the cold rock,  
I made the gods less than men  
for I was a man and they my work;

and now what is it that has come to pass?  
for fire has shaken my hand,  
my strivings are dust.

#### IV

Now what is it that has come to pass?  
over my head, fire stands,  
my marbles are alert:

each of the gods, perfect,  
cries out from a perfect throat:  
*you are useless,*  
*no marble can bind me,*  
*no stone suggest.*

#### V

They have melted into the light  
and I am desolate;  
they have melted;  
each from his plinth,  
each one departs;

they have gone;  
what agony can express my grief?

each from his marble base  
has stepped into the light  
and my work is for naught.

#### VI

Now am I the power  
that has made this fire



as of old I made the gods  
start from the rocks?  
am I the god?  
or does this fire carve me  
for its use?

## EURYPIDICE

### I

So you have swept me back,  
I who could have walked with the live souls  
above the earth,  
I who could have slept among the live flowers  
at last;

so for your arrogance  
and your ruthlessness  
I am swept back  
where dead lichens drip  
dead cinders upon moss of ash;

so for your arrogance  
I am broken at last,  
I who had lived unconscious,  
who was almost forgot;

if you had let me wait  
I had grown from listlessness  
into peace,

if you had let me rest with the dead,  
I had forgot you  
and the past.

## II

Here only flame upon flame  
and black among the red sparks,  
streaks of black and light  
grown colourless;

why did you turn back,  
that hell should be reinhabited  
of myself thus  
swept into nothingness?

why did you turn?  
why did you glance back?  
why did you hesitate for that moment?  
why did you bend your face  
caught with the flame of the upper earth,  
above my face?

what was it that crossed my face  
with the light from yours  
and your glance?  
what was it you saw in my face?  
the light of your own face,  
the fire of your own presence?

What had my face to offer  
but reflex of the earth,  
hyacinth colour  
caught from the raw fissure in the rock  
where the light struck,  
and the colour of azure crocuses  
and the bright surface of gold crocuses  
and of the wind-flower,  
swift in its veins as lightning  
and as white.

### III

Saffron from the fringe of the earth,  
wild saffron that has bent  
over the sharp edge of earth,  
all the flowers that cut through the earth,  
all, all the flowers are lost;

everything is lost,  
everything is crossed with black,  
black upon black  
and worse than black,  
this colourless light.

### IV

Fringe upon fringe  
of blue crocuses,

crocuses, walled against blue of themselves,  
blue of that upper earth,  
blue of the depth upon depth of flowers,  
lost;

flowers,  
if I could have taken once my breath of them,  
enough of them,  
more than earth,  
even than of the upper earth,  
had passed with me  
beneath the earth;

if I could have caught up from the earth,  
the whole of the flowers of the earth,  
if once I could have breathed into myself  
the very golden crocuses  
and the red,  
and the very golden hearts of the first saffron,  
the whole of the golden mass,  
the whole of the great fragrance,  
I could have dared the loss.

V

So for your arrogance  
and your ruthlessness  
I have lost the earth  
and the flowers of the earth,  
and the live souls above the earth,

and you who passed across the light  
and reached  
ruthless;

you who have your own light,  
who are to yourself a presence,  
who need no presence;

yet for all your arrogance  
and your glance,  
I tell you this:

such loss is no loss,  
such terror, such coils and strands and pitfalls  
of blackness,  
such terror  
is no loss;

hell is no worse than your earth  
above the earth,  
hell is no worse,  
no, nor your flowers  
nor your veins of light  
nor your presence,  
a loss;

my hell is no worse than yours  
though you pass among the flowers and speak  
with the spirits above earth.

## VI

Against the black  
I have more fervour  
than you in all the splendour of that place,  
against the blackness  
and the stark grey  
I have more light;

and the flowers,  
if I should tell you,  
you would turn from your own fit paths  
toward hell,  
turn again and glance back

and I would sink into a place  
even more terrible than this.

## VII

At least I have the flowers of myself,  
and my thoughts, no god  
can take that;  
I have the fervour of myself for a presence  
and my own spirit for light;

and my spirit with its loss  
knows this;  
though small against the black,

small against the formless rocks,  
hell must break before I am lost;

before I am lost,  
hell must open like a red rose  
for the dead to pass.



## OREAD

WHIRL up, sea—  
whirl your pointed pines,  
splash your great pines  
on our rocks,  
hurl your green over us,  
cover us with your pools of fir.

## THE POOL

ARE you alive?

I touch you.

You quiver like a sea-fish.

I cover you with my net.

What are you—banded one?

## MOONRISE

WILL you glimmer on the sea?  
will you fling your spear-head  
on the shore?  
what note shall we pitch?  
we have a song,  
on the bank we share our arrows;  
the loosed string tells our note:

O flight,  
bring her swiftly to our song.  
She is great,  
we measure her by the pine trees.

## ORION DEAD

THE cornel-trees  
uplift from the furrows;  
the roots at their bases  
strike lower through the barley-sprays.

So arise and face me.  
I am poisoned with rage of song.

I once pierced the flesh  
of the wild deer,  
now I am afraid to touch  
the blue and the gold-veined hyacinths.

I will tear the full flowers  
and the little heads  
of the grape-hyacinths;  
I will strip the life from the bulb  
until the ivory layers  
lie like narcissus petals  
on the black earth.

Arise,  
lest I bend an ash-tree  
into a taut bow,

and slay—and tear  
all the roots from the earth.

The cornel-wood blazes  
and strikes through the barley-sprays  
but I have lost heart for this.

I break a staff.  
I break the tough branch.  
I know no light in the woods.  
I have lost pace with the wind.

## HERMONAX

Gods of the sea;  
Ino,  
leaving warm meads  
for the green, grey-green fastnesses  
of the great deeps;  
and Palemon,  
bright seeker of sea-shaft,  
hear me.

Let all whom the sea loves  
come to its altar front,  
and I  
who can offer no other sacrifice to thee  
bring this.

Broken by great waves,  
the wavelets flung it here,  
this sea-gliding creature,  
this strange creature like a weed,  
covered with salt foam,  
torn from the hillocks of rock.

I, Hermonax,  
caster of nets,  
risking chance,  
plying the sea craft,  
came on it.

Thus to sea god,  
gift of sea wrack;  
I, Hermonax, offer it  
to thee, Ino,  
and to Palemon.

## SITALKAS

THOU art come at length  
more beautiful  
than any cool god  
in a chamber under  
Lycia's far coast,  
than any high god  
who touches us not  
here in the seeded grass,  
aye, than Argestes  
scattering the broken leaves.



## THE TRIBUTE

### I

SQUALOR spreads its hideous length  
through the carts and the asses' feet,  
squalor coils and reopens  
and creeps under barrow  
and heap of refuse  
and the broken sherds  
of the market-place—  
it lengthens and coils  
and uncoils and draws back  
and recoils  
through the crooked streets.

Squalor blights and makes hideous  
our lives—it has smothered  
the beat of our songs,  
and our hearts are spread out,  
flowers—opened but to receive  
the wheel of the cart,  
the hoof of the ox,  
to be trod of the sheep.

Squalor spreads its hideous length  
through the carts and the asses' feet—  
squalor has entered and taken our songs  
and we haggle and cheat,  
praise fabrics worn threadbare,  
ring false coin for silver,  
offer refuse for meat.

2

While we shouted our wares  
with the swindler and beggar,  
our cheap stuffs for the best,  
while we cheated and haggled and bettered  
each low trick  
and railed with the rest—

In a trice squalor failed,  
even squalor to cheat  
for a voice  
caught the sky in one sudden note,  
spread grass at the horses' feet,  
spread a carpet of scented thyme  
and meadow-sweet  
till the asses lifted their heads  
to the air  
with the stifled cattle and sheep.

Ah, squalor was cheated at last

for a bright head flung back,  
caught the ash-tree fringe  
of the foot-hill,  
the violet slope of the hill,  
one bright head flung back  
stilled the haggling,  
one throat bared  
and the shouting was still.

Clear, clear—  
till our heart's shell was reft  
with the shrill notes,  
our old hatreds were healed.

Squalor spreads its hideous length  
through the carts and the asses' feet,  
squalor coils and draws back  
and recoils  
with no voice to rebuke—  
for the boys have gone out of the city,  
the songs withered black on their lips.

### 3

And we turn from the market,  
the haggling, the beggar, the cheat,  
to cry to the gods of the city  
in the open space  
of the temple—

we enter the temple-space  
to cry to the gods and forget  
the clamour, the filth.

We turn to the old gods of the city,  
of the city once blessed  
with daemon and spirit of blitheness  
and spirit of mirth,  
we cry;  
what god with shy laughter,  
or with slender winged ankles is left?

What god, what bright spirit for us,  
what daemon is left  
of the many that crowded the porches  
that haunted the streets,  
what fair god  
with bright sandal and belt?

Though we tried the old turns of the city  
and searched the old streets,  
though we cried to the gods of the city:  
O spirits, turn back,  
re-enter the gates of our city—  
we met  
but one god,  
one tall god with a spear-shaft,  
one bright god with a lance.

They have sent the old gods from the city:  
 on the temple step,  
 the people gather to cry for revenge,  
 to chant their hymns and to praise  
 the god of the lance.

They have banished the gods  
 and the half-gods  
 from the city streets,  
 they have turned from the god  
 of the cross roads,  
 the god of the hearth,  
 the god of the sunken well  
 and the fountain source,  
 they have chosen one,  
 to him only  
 they offer pæan and chant.

Though but one god is left in the city,  
 shall we turn to his treacherous feet,  
 though but one god is left in the city,  
 can he lure us  
 with his clamour and shout,  
 can he snare our hearts in his net,  
 can he blind us  
 with the light of his lance?

Could he snare our spirit and flesh,  
he would cast it in irons to lie  
and rot in the sodden grass,  
and we know his glamour is dross,  
we know him a blackened light,  
and his beauty withered and spent  
beside one young life that is lost.

5

Though not one of the city turned,  
not one girl but to glance  
with contempt toward us  
that our hearts were so faint  
with despair and doubt,  
contempt for us that our lips  
could not sing to the god of the lance—

Though not one of the city turned  
as we searched through the city streets,  
though the maidens gathered their veils  
and the women their robes  
as we passed:—

Though not one of the city turned  
as we paused at the city gate,  
a few old men rose up  
with eyes no fear or contempt  
could harden—with lips worn frail  
with no words of hate.

A few old men rose up  
with a few sad women to greet and to hail us,  
a few lads crept to welcome  
and comfort us, their white brows  
set with hope  
as light circles an olive-branch.

6

With these we will cry to another,  
with these we will stand apart  
to lure some god to our city,  
to hail him:  
return from your brake,  
your copse or your forest haunt.

O spirit still left to our city,  
we call to your wooded haunt,  
we cry:  
O daemon of grasses,  
O spirit of simples and roots,  
O gods of the plants of the earth—

O god of the simples and grasses,  
we cry to you now from our hearts,  
O heal us—bring balm for our sickness,  
return and soothe us with bark  
and hemlock and feverwort.

O god of the power to strike out  
memory of terror past,  
bring branch of heal-all and tufts,  
of the sweet and the bitter grass,  
bring shaft and flower of the reeds  
and cresses and meadow plants.

Return—look again on our city,  
though the people cry through the streets,  
though they hail another,  
have pity—return to our gates,  
with a love as great as theirs,  
we entreat you  
for our city's sake.

7

As we lift the bright heads  
of the wild flowers,  
compare leaf to leaf,  
as we touch the hemlock and poppy,  
may our spirits released,  
forget this despair and torture,  
this terror and doubt.

As we lift the bright heads  
of the wild flowers,  
may we know that our spirits are kept  
as they are, folded and wrapped  
apart in a sheltering leaf.



We are veiled as the bud of the poppy  
in the poppy-sheath,  
and our hearts will break from their bondage  
and spread as the poppy-leaf—  
leaf by leaf, radiant and perfect  
at last in the summer heat.

May we know that our spirits at last  
will be cleansed of all bitterness—  
that no one god may trample the earth,  
but the others still dwell apart  
in a high place  
with our dead and our lost.

8

That the boys our city has lost  
and the gods still dwell apart  
in a city set fairer than this  
with column and porch.

That the boys still dwell apart  
and laugh in their gladness and shout  
their challenges each to each  
for the foot race or the wrestling match—

They stand in a circle and laugh  
and challenge each other to meet  
with jest that no shield or shape  
of banner or helmet or dress—

That no banner or shield or shape  
or colour of tunic or vest  
can divide now or rend their hearts  
as they leap toward the wrestling match,  
as they strip for the race—

That the boys of the cities keep  
with the gods apart,  
for our world was too base  
for their youth,  
our city too dark,  
our thoughts were too dull for their thoughts,  
our heart for their hearts.

9

We will choose for each lad of the city,  
a flower or a spray of grass—

For the lads who drew apart,  
the scholar and poet we place  
wind-flower or lily or wreath  
of ivy and crocus shaft,  
and the lads who went to slay  
with passion and thirst,  
we give roses and flowers of bay.

That the lads in that city apart  
may know of our love and keep

remembrance and speak of us—  
may lift their hands that the gods  
revisit earth.

That the lads of the cities  
may yet remember us,  
we spread shaft of privet and sweet  
lily from meadow and forest,  
and the wild white lily,  
and the wood-lily,  
and the red shaft from the mountain-side.

IO

And this we will say for remembrance,  
speak this with their names:

Could beauty be done to death,  
they had struck her dead  
in ages and ages past,  
could beauty be withered from earth,  
they had cast her forth,  
root and stalk  
scattered and flailed—

They had trod her to death with sneers,  
they had bartered her  
for a piece of thin money tossed up  
to fall half alloy,  
they had stripped her and sent her forth.

Could beauty be caught and hurt,  
could beauty be rent with a thought,  
for a thrust of a sword;  
for a piece of thin money tossed up  
then beauty were dead.

Long, long before we came to earth,  
long, long before we rent our hearts  
with this worship, this fear  
and this dread.

## II

Could beauty be done to death—  
though the swirl of the thousands cross  
and eddy and fall away,

though the crowd of the millions meet  
to shout and slay,

though the host of the people pass  
and famish in bitterness,  
state by state, people by people,  
and perish—we cry:

Could beauty be caught and hurt,  
could beauty be rent with a thought,  
could beauty be beaten out,  
O gold, stray but alive  
on the dead ash of our hearth—

Could beauty be caught and hurt  
they had done her to death with their sneers  
in ages and ages past,  
could beauty be sacrificed  
for a thrust of a sword,  
for a piece of thin money  
tossed up to fall half alloy—  
then beauty were dead  
long, long before we saw her face.

Could beauty be beaten out,—  
O youth the cities have sent  
to strike at each other's strength,  
it is you who have kept her alight.



*CHORUSES FROM THE  
IPHIGENEIA IN AULIS AND THE  
HIPPOLYTUS OF EURIPIDES*

TRANSLATED BY H. D.







FROM THE IPHIGENEIA IN AULIS  
OF EURIPIDES

I

CHORUS OF THE WOMEN OF CHALKIS

I

I CROSSED sand-hills.

I stand among the sea-drift before Aulis.

I crossed Euripos' strait—

Foam hissed after my boat.

I left Chalkis,

My city and the rock-ledges.

Arethusa twists among the boulders,

Increases—cuts into the surf.

I come to see the battle-line

And the ships rowed here

By these spirits—

The Greeks are but half-man.

Golden Menelaus

And Agamemnon of proud birth

Direct the thousand ships.

They have cut pine-trees  
For their oars.  
They have gathered the ships for one purpose:  
Helen shall return.

There are clumps of marsh-reed  
And spear-grass about the strait.  
Paris the herdsman passed through them  
When he took Helen—Aphrodite's gift.

For he had judged the goddess  
More beautiful than Hera.  
Pallas was no longer radiant  
As the three stood  
Among the fresh-shallows of the strait.

2

I crept through the woods  
Between the altars:  
Artemis haunts the place.  
Shame, scarlet, fresh-opened—a flower,  
Strikes across my face.  
And sudden—light upon shields,  
Low huts—the armed Greeks,  
Circles of horses.

I have longed for this.  
I have seen Ajax.

I have known Protesilaos  
And that other Ajax—Salamis' light  
They counted ivory-discs.  
They moved them—they laughed.  
They were seated together  
On the sand-ridges.

I have seen Palamed,  
Child of Poseidon's child:  
Diomed, radiant discobolus:  
Divine Merion, a war-god,  
Startling to men:  
Island Odysseus from the sea-rocks:

And Nireos, most beautiful  
Of beautiful Greeks.

### 3

A flash—  
Achilles passed across the beach.  
(He is the sea-woman's child  
Chiron instructed.)

Achilles had strapped the wind  
About his ankles,  
He brushed rocks  
The waves had flung.  
He ran in armour.

He led the four-yoked chariot  
He had challenged to the foot-race.  
Emelos steered  
And touched each horse with pointed goad.

I saw the horses:  
Each beautiful head was clamped with gold.

Silver streaked the centre horses.  
They were fastened to the pole.  
The outriders swayed to the road-stead.  
Colour spread up from ankle and steel-hoof.  
Bronze flashed.

And Achilles, set with brass,  
Bent forward,  
Level with the chariot-rail.

4

If a god should stand here  
He could not speak  
At the sight of ships  
Circled with ships.

This beauty is too much  
For any woman.  
It is burnt across my eyes.

The line is an ivory-horn:  
The Myrmidons in fifty quivering ships  
Are stationed on the right.

These are Achilles' ships.  
On the prow of each  
A goddess sheds gold:  
Sea-spirits are cut in tiers of gold.

5

Next, equal-oared ships  
Were steered from the port of Argos  
By one of the Mekistians.  
Sthenelos was with him.

Then the son of Theseus  
Led out sixty ships,  
Prow to prow from Attica.  
A great spirit keeps them—  
Pallas, graved above each ship.

6

Wings bear her  
And horses, iron of hoof:  
The phantom and chariot  
Appear to men slashed with waves.

Fifty Bæotian ships,  
Heavy with bright arms,  
Floated next:  
The earth-god stood at the prow  
With golden-headed serpent.

Leitos, born of earth,  
Guided this group of ships.

Ships had gathered  
From ports of Phokis:  
The Lokrians sent as many.  
Ajax left beautiful Thronion  
To lead both fleets.

7 :

From Mykenæ's unhewn rock,  
Men, led out by Agamemnon,  
Served beyond the breakwater  
In one hundred ships.  
His brother went with him—  
' Lover to lover.

Insult was thrown upon both.  
Helen, possessed,  
Followed a stranger  
From the Greek courtyard.  
They would avenge this.

Nestor brought ships from Pylos.  
They are stamped  
With Alpheus' bull-hoof.

8

There were twelve Ænian sails:  
Gouneos led the twelve ships.  
He is the tribe-king.  
Near him were Elis' petty-chiefs—  
The common people call Epians—  
And Eurytos, their great chief.

Meges brought white-wood oars  
From island Taphos.  
He left Echinades—  
Sailors find no entrance  
Across the narrow rocks.

Ajax of Salamis  
Finished the great arc:  
He joined both branches  
To the far border  
With twelve ships,  
Strung of flexible planks.

9

I have heard all this.  
I have looked too

Upon this people of ships.  
You could never count the Greek sails  
Nor the flat keels of the foreign boats.

I have heard—

I myself have seen the floating ships  
And nothing will ever be the same—  
The shouts,  
The harrowing voices within the house.  
I stand apart with an army:  
My mind is graven with ships.

## II

Paris came to Ida.  
He grew to slim height  
Among the silver-hoofed beasts.  
Strange notes made his flute  
A Phrygian pipe.  
He caught all Olympus  
In his bent reeds.  
While his great beasts  
Cropped the grass,  
The goddesses held the contest  
Which sent him among the Greeks.

He came before Helen's house.  
He stood on the ivory steps.  
He looked upon Helen and brought



Desire to the eyes  
That looked back—  
The Greeks have snatched up their spears.  
They have pointed the helms of their ships  
Toward the bulwarks of Troy.

### III

#### I

The crowd of the Greek force  
With stacked arms and with troop-ships  
Will come to Simois—  
The strait, furrowed deep with silver.

They will enter Troy.  
The sun-god built the porticoes.  
Kassandra shakes out her hair—  
Its gold clasped  
With half-opened laurel-shoots—  
When the god strikes her  
With his breath.

They will stand on Pergamos.  
They will crowd about the walls.

They will lift their shields,  
Riveted with brass,  
As they enter Simois  
In their painted ships.

Two brothers of Helen are spirits  
And dwell apart in the air,  
Yet the shieldsmen will take her,  
And men, alert with spear-shaft,  
Will carry her to the Greek coast.

2

And Pergamos,  
City of the Phrygians,  
Ancient Troy  
Will be given up to its fate.  
They will mark the stone-battlements  
And the circle of them  
With a bright stain.  
They will cast out the dead—  
A sight for Priam's queen to lament  
And her frightened daughters.

And Helen, child of Zeus,  
Will cry aloud for the mate  
She has left in that Phrygian town.

May no child of mine,  
Nor any child of my child  
Ever fashion such a tale  
As the Phrygians shall murmur,  
As they stoop at their distaffs,  
Whispering with Lydians,  
Splendid with weight of gold—

"Helen has brought this.  
They will tarnish our bright hair.  
They will take us as captives  
For Helen—born of Zeus  
When he sought Leda with bird-wing  
And touched her with bird-throat—  
If men speak truth.

"But still we lament our state,  
The desert of our wide courts,  
Even if there is no truth  
In the legends cut on ivory  
Nor in the poets  
Nor the songs."

#### IV

##### I

Burnished-head  
By burnished-head,  
Pierides sought the bride:  
They touched the flute-stops  
And the lyre-strings for the dance,

They made the syrinx-notes  
Shrill through the reed-stalk.  
They cut gold sandal-prints  
Across Pelion  
Toward the gods' feast.

They called Pelios  
From steep centaur-paths,  
And Thetis  
Among forest trees:  
They chanted at the feast  
Where Phrygian Ganymede,  
Loved of Zeus,  
Caught the measure of wine  
In the circle of the golden cups.

While fifty sea-spirits  
Moved and paused  
To mark the beat  
Of chanted words  
Where light flashed  
Below them on the sand.

2

A centaur-herd,  
Wild-horses, crowned with grass,  
Swept among the feasting gods  
With fir-shoots  
Toward the wine-jars.  
And Chiron,  
Inspired by the rites of song,  
Cried with a loud voice:

"From Thessaly,  
The great light

Whom Thetis will beget,"  
(He spoke his namé)  
"Will come with the Myrmidons  
Spearsmen and hosts with shields,  
Golden and metal-wrought, -  
To scatter fire  
Over Priam's beautiful land."

Therefore the spirits blessed  
The fair-fathered,  
The Nereid,  
And chanted at Pelios' feast.

3

(*To Iphigeneia.*)  
Your hair is scattered light:  
The Greeks will bind it with petals.

And like a little beast,  
Dappled and without horns,  
That scampered on the hill-rocks,  
They will leave you  
With stained throat—  
Though you never cropped hill-grass  
To the reed-cry  
And the shepherd's note.

Some Greek hero is cheated

And your mother's court  
Of its bride.

And we ask this—where truth is,  
Of what use is valour and is worth?  
For evil has conquered the race,  
There is no power but in base men,  
Nor any man whom the gods do not hate.

## V

*Iph.* It is not for me, the day,  
Nor this light of sun.  
Ah, mother, mother,  
The same terror is cast on us both.

Alas for that Phrygian cleft,  
Beaten by snow,  
The mountain-hill, Ida,  
Where Priam left the young prince,  
Brought far from his mother  
To perish on the rocks:  
Paris who is called  
Idæos, Idæos  
In the Phrygian court.

Would that he had never thrived,  
Would that he had not kept the flocks  
O that he had not dwelt  
At that white place of the water-gods:

In meadows,  
Thick with yellow flower-sprays  
And flowers, tint of rose,  
And the hyacinth we break for gods.

For Pallas came there,  
And Kypris, crafty-heart,  
And Hera and Hermes, legate of god  
(Beautiful Kypris,  
Pallas with spear-hilt,  
Hera, queen, wed with Zeus.)  
It was a hated judgment, O slender-girls.  
The contest of beautiful-face by beautiful-face  
Has brought this:  
I am sent to death  
To bring honour to the Greeks.

*Ch.* For Ilium, for Ilium  
Artemis exacts sacrifice.

*Iph.* O wretched, wretched,—  
I know you, Helen, sharp to do hurt.  
I am slaughtered for your deceit.

O I am miserable:  
You cherished me, my mother,  
But even you desert me.  
I am sent to an empty place.

O that Aulis had not harboured  
These beaked ships,  
Nor sheltered their brazen prows  
As they floated toward Troy:  
O that Zeus had not turned them  
Nor wafted their splendour  
Through the straits:  
For Zeus strikes different winds  
To each ship,  
So that some men laugh  
With the light flap of the sails,  
Some bend with anger  
At their work:

Some haul up the sheets,  
Some knot the great ropes,  
Some dash through the spray  
To quick death.

And each man is marked for toil,  
Much labour is his fate,  
Nor is there any new hurt  
That may be added to the race.

## VI

*Iph.* Now sing, O slight girls,  
Without change of note,  
My death-pæon and Artemis' chant.



Stand silent, you Greeks.  
The fire kindles.  
They step to do sacrifice  
With reed-basket of salt-cakes:  
I come—I free Hellas.  
My father, as priest awaits me  
At the right altar-step.

Hail me now.  
I destroy Phrygia and all Troy.  
Clasp on the flower-circlet.  
Wind it through the locks just caught with it.  
Bear water in a deep bowl.  
Stand around the temple-front  
And the altar of heaped earth.  
For I come to do sacrifice,  
To break the might of the curse,  
To honour the queen, if she permit,  
The great one, with my death.

*Ch.* O, mother, high-born,  
Of proud birth,  
Will you not weep for us?  
For we may not cry out  
In the splendour of this holy place.

*Iph.* Slight girls, stand forth,  
Chant Artemis—Artemis:  
She fronts the coast,

She stands opposite Chalkis—  
For spears will clash in the contest  
My fame has brought  
In the shelter of these narrow straits.

Hail, land of my birth.  
Hail Mykenæ, where I once dwelt—

*Ch.* (She calls upon the city of Perseos,  
Built of unchiselled rock.)

*Iph.*—you brought me to the Greek light  
And I will not hold you guilty  
For my death.

*Ch.* Your name will never be forgotten,  
Your honour will always last.

*Iph.* Alas, day, you brought light,  
You trailed splendour  
You showed us god:  
I salute you, most precious one,  
But I go to a new place,  
Another life.

*Ch.* Alas, she steps forward  
To destroy Ilium and the Phrygians.  
A wreath is about her head,  
She takes water in a dish.

She comes to meet death,  
To stain the altar of the goddess,  
To hold her girl-throat  
Toward the knife-thrust.

The land-springs await  
And the sacred bowls,  
And the Greek host, eager to depart.  
But let us not forget  
With our past happiness,  
Artemis, daughter of god,  
Queen among the great,  
But cry out:  
Artemis, rejoicer in blood-sacrifice,  
Send the force of the Greeks  
To Troy and the Phrygian court.

And grant that Agamemnon may clasp  
Fame, never to be forgot  
Upon his brow—encircled  
By Greek spear-shafts,  
May he gain honour for all the Greeks.

FROM THE HIPPOLYTUS OF  
EURIPIDES

I

THERAPONTES.

DAEMON initiate, spirit  
of the god-race, Artemis,  
Latona's daughter,  
child of Zeus,  
of all maids loveliest,  
we greet you, mistress:  
you dwell in your father's house,  
the gold-wrought porches of Zeus,  
apart in the depth of space.

HIPPOLYTUS.

Of all maids, loveliest,  
I greet you, Artemis,  
loveliest upon Olympus:  
dearest, to you this gift,  
flower set by flower and leaf,  
broken by uncut grass,  
where neither scythe has dipped  
nor does the shepherd yet

venture to lead his sheep;  
there it is white and fragrant,  
the wild-bee swirls across;  
as a slow rivulet,  
mystic peace broods and drifts:

Ah! but my own, my dearest,  
take for your gold-wrought locks  
from my hands these flowers,  
as from a spirit.

## II

### CHORUS OF TROIZENIAN WOMEN.

At high-tide,  
the sea—they say—  
left a deep pool  
below the rock-shelf:  
in that clear place  
where the women dip  
their water-jars,  
my friend steeped her veils  
and spread the scarlet stuff  
across the hot ridge  
of sun-baked rocks:  
she first brought word  
of my mistress:

“She lies sick,  
faint on her couch  
within the palace;  
her thin veils  
cast a shadow  
across her bright locks.  
I count three days  
since her beautiful lips  
touched the fine wheat—  
her frail body  
disdains nourishment:  
she suffers—  
some secret hurt  
hastens her death.”

Surely, O young queen,  
you are possessed  
by Pan, by Hecate,  
by some spirit  
of the Corybantic rites,  
or by Cybele  
from the hill-rocks!  
or have you sinned  
that you suffer thus,  
against Artemis?  
Have you offered  
no sacrificial cakes  
to the huntress?  
For she walks above earth,

along the sea-coast,  
and across the salt trail  
of the sea-drift.

Or is it that your lord,  
born of Erechtheus,  
the king most noble in descent,  
neglects you in the palace  
and your bride-couch  
for another in secret?  
Or has some sea-man,  
landing at our port,  
friendly to ships,  
brought sad news from Crete?  
For some great hurt  
binds you to your couch,  
broken in spirit.

### III

PHÆDRA.

Lift my head, help me up,  
I am bruised, bone and flesh;  
chafe my white hands, my servants:  
this weight about my forehead?  
Ah, my veil—loose it—  
spread my hair across my breast.

TROPHOS.

There, do not start,  
child, nor toss about;  
only calm and high pride  
can help your hurt:  
fate tries all alike.

PHÆDRA.

Ai, ai! to drink deep  
of spring water  
from its white source;  
ai, ai! for rest—black poplars—  
thick grass—sleep.

TROPHOS.

What is this you ask,  
wild words, mad speech—  
hide your hurt, my heart,  
hide your hurt  
before these servants.

PHÆDRA.

Take me to the mountains!  
O for woods, pine tracts,  
where hounds athirst for death,  
leap on the bright stags!  
God, how I would shout to the beasts  
with my gold hair torn loose;  
I would shake the Thessalian dart,  
I would hurl the barbed arrow from my grasp.



TROPHOS.

Why, so distraught,  
child, child, why the chase  
and this cold water you would ask:  
but we may get you that  
from deep rills that cut the slopes  
before the gate.

PHÆDRA.

Artemis of the salt beach  
and of the sea-coast,  
mistress of the race-course,  
trodden of swift feet,  
O for your flat sands  
where I might mount  
with goad and whip  
the horses of Enetas.

#### IV

O Spirit,  
spark by spark,  
you instil fire  
through the sight:  
to hearts you attack  
you grant rare happiness!  
Do not front me with grief,  
yourself discord manifest!

For neither lightning-shaft  
nor yet stars shot  
from a distant place  
can equal the love-dart,  
sped from your hands,  
child of God, Eros.

In vain along Alpheos,  
in vain (if we defy Eros)  
are the Greek altars  
bright with blood,  
and the Pythian rocks  
with beasts slain  
for Helios:  
Aphrodite's child  
is man's chief absolute:  
he protects love's portal  
and love's rite,  
or ruthlessly betrays men,  
destroying them  
in his flight.

So at Oechalie,  
that girl, chaste—  
a wild colt,  
mateless, uncaught—  
was betrayed by Kupris:  
Heracles dragged her,  
a bacchante, hell-loosed,

from her palace  
to his ship:  
there was flame and blood spilt  
for the bride-chant,  
for rapture, unhappiness.

O Thebes,  
high-built and chaste,  
O Dirke's river-bank,  
you can tell how Kupris strikes:  
for with thunder-bolt,  
alight at both points,  
she slew the mother of Bacchus,  
child of Zeus!  
Ah evil wedlock! Ah fate!  
she incites all to evil,  
she flutters over all things,  
like a bee in flight.

## V

O for wings,  
swift, a bird,  
set of God  
among the bird-flocks!  
I would dart  
from some Adriatic precipice,  
across its wave-shallows and 'crests,  
to Eradanus' river-source;

to the place  
where his daughters weep,  
thrice-hurt for Phæton's sake,  
tears of amber and gold which dart  
their fire through the purple surface.

I would seek  
the song-haunted Hesperides  
and the apple-trees  
set above the sand drift:  
there the god  
of the purple marsh  
lets no ships pass;  
he marks the sky-space  
which Atlas keeps—  
that holy place  
where streams,  
fragrant as honey,  
pass to the couches spread  
in the palace of Zeus:  
there the earth-spirit,  
source of bliss,  
grants the gods happiness.

O ship  
white-sailed of Crete,  
you brought my mistress  
from her quiet palace  
through breaker and crash of surf

to love-rite of unhappiness!  
Though the boat swept  
toward great Athens,  
though she was made fast  
with ship-cable and ship-rope  
at Munychia the sea-port,  
though her men stood  
on the main-land,  
(whether unfriended by all alike  
or only by the gods of Crete)  
it was evil—the auspice.

On this account  
~~my~~ mistress,  
most sick at heart,  
is stricken of Kupris  
with unchaste thought:  
helpless and overwrought,  
she would fasten  
the rope-noose about the beam  
above her bride-couch  
and tie it to her white throat:  
she would placate the dæmon's wrath,  
still the love-fever in her breast,  
and keep her spirit inviolate.

## VI

No more, O my spirit,  
are we flawless,  
we have seen evil undrempt:  
I myself saw it:  
the Greek, the most luminous,  
the Athenian, the star-like,  
banished through his father's hate  
to a country far distant.

O sand dunes and sand-stretches  
of the Athenian coast,  
O mountain-thickets  
where you climbed,  
following the wild beasts,  
with hounds, delicate of feet,  
hunting with the dæmon, Artemis!

No more  
will you mount your chariot,  
yoked with horses of Enetas,  
nor spur forward your steed  
toward the stadium at Limnas,  
and your chant, ever rapturous,  
and the answering lyre-note,  
shall cease in the king's house:  
far in the forest depth  
in the glades where she loves to rest,

Latona's child shall be crownless:  
at your flight  
the contest of the maidens will cease,  
and their love-longing, comfortless.

And because of your fate,  
I accept bitter hurt,  
and weep:  
ai, ai, poor mother,  
your birth-pangs were fruitless:  
I am wroth with these spirits:  
alas, Karites, never-separate,  
why, why have you sent him forth,  
the unfortunate, blameless,  
from his palace,  
from his own gates?

## VII

Men you strike  
and the gods'  
dauntless spirits alike,  
and Eros helps you, O Kupris,  
with wings' swift  
interplay of light:  
now he flies above earth,  
now above sea-crash  
and whirl of salt:  
he enchants beasts

who dwell in the hills  
and shoals in the sea-depth:  
he darts gold wings  
maddening their spirits:  
he charms all born of earth,  
(all whom Helios visits,  
fiery with light)  
and men's hearts:  
you alone, Kupris,  
creator of all life,  
reign absolute.



## ODYSSEY

*Muse,  
tell me of this man of wit,  
who roamed long years  
after he had sacked  
Troy's sacred streets.*

All the rest  
who had escaped death,  
returned,  
fleeing battle and the sea;  
only Odysseus,  
captive of a goddess,  
desperate and home-sick,  
thought but of his wife and palace;  
but Calypso,  
that nymph and spirit,  
yearning in the furrowed rock-shelf,  
burned  
and sought to be his mistress;  
but years passed,  
the time was ripe,  
the gods decreed,  
(although traitors plot  
to betray him in his own court),

he was to return  
to Ithaca;  
and all the gods pitied him;  
but Poseidon  
steadfast to the last  
hated  
god-like Odysseus.

The sea-god visited  
a distant folk,  
Ethiopians,  
who at the edge of earth  
are divided into two parts,  
(half watch the sun rise,  
half, the sun set),  
there the hecatomb  
of slain sheep and oxen  
await his revels:  
and while he rejoiced,  
seated at the feast,  
the rest of the gods  
gathered in the palace of Olympian Zeus;  
and the father of men and of gods spoke thus:  
(for he remembered bright Egisthus,  
slain of Agamemnon's child,  
great Orestes:)

O you spirits,  
how men hate the gods,

for they say evil comes of us,  
when they themselves,  
by their own wickedness,  
court peril  
beyond their fate;  
so Egisthus, defiant,  
sought Agamemnon's wife  
and slew Agamemnon  
returning to his own palace,  
though we ourselves  
sent bright Hermes,  
slayer of Argos,  
to warn him  
lest Orestes,  
attaining to man's estate,  
demand his inheritance  
and take vengeance:  
we forbade him to strike the king,  
we warned him to respect his wife;  
but could Hermes  
of gracious aspect,  
subtle with kindly speech,  
thus avert the foul work?

Then the grey-eyed Athene,  
the goddess, spoke:  
O my father, Kronos begot,  
first among the great,  
his death at least was just,

so may all perish who err thus;  
but my heart is rent  
for the prudent Odysseus,  
who, exiled from his friends,  
is kept too long distressed  
in an island, sea swept,  
in the sea midst,  
a forest island,  
haunt of a spirit,  
child of Atlas,  
crafty of thought,  
who knows the sea depth,  
who supports the high pillars  
which cut sky from earth;  
it is his child  
who keeps Odysseus  
lamenting with broken heart,  
ceaseless to tempt him  
with soft and tender speech,  
that he forget Ithaca;  
but Odysseus,  
yearning to see but the smoke  
drift above his own house,  
prefers death;  
your heart, is it not touched,  
O Olympian?  
did not Odysseus please you  
when he made sacrifice  
before the Grecian ships

in great Troy?  
why are you angry, Zeus?

Then Zeus,  
keeper of the clouds,  
answering her, spoke:  
O my child  
what quaint words  
have sped your lips,  
for how could I forget  
the god-like Odysseus,  
a spirit surpassing men,  
first to make sacrifice  
to the deathless  
in the sky-space?  
but Poseidon,  
girder of earth,  
though yet he spares his life,  
nurtures unending hate;  
he goads him from place to place  
because of the Cyclops  
blinded of Odysseus,  
Polyphemus, half-god,  
greatest of the Cyclops,  
whom the nymph Thoosa,  
child of Phorcys,  
king of the waste sea, begot  
when she lay with Poseidon  
among the shallow rocks:

but come,  
let us plot  
to reinstate Odysseus,  
and Poseidon must abandon his wrath;  
for what can one god accomplish,  
striving alone  
to defy all the deathless?

Then the grey-eyed Athene,  
the goddess, spoke:  
O my father, Kronos begot,  
first among the great,  
if then it seems just  
to the highest,  
that Odysseus return  
to his own house,  
let us swiftly send  
Hermes, slayer of Argos,  
your attendant,  
that he state  
to the fair-haired nymph,  
our irrevocable wish,  
that Odysseus,  
valiant of heart,  
be sent back:  
and I will depart to Ithaca,  
to incite his son,  
to put courage in his heart,  
that he call to the market place

the long-haired Greeks  
and shut his gates  
to the pretendants  
who ceaselessly devour his flocks,  
sheep and horned oxen  
of gentle pace:  
that he strive  
for his father's sake  
and gain favour  
in men's thoughts,  
I will send him to Sparta,  
to Pylos' sandy waste.

*She spoke  
and about her feet  
clasped bright sandals,  
gold-wrought, imperishable,  
which lift her above sea,  
across the land stretch,  
wind-like,  
like the wind breath.*





*HYMEN*

*They said:  
she is high and far and blind  
in her high pride,  
but now that my head is bowed  
in sorrow, I find  
she is most kind.*

*We have taken life, they said,  
blithely, not groped in a mist  
for things that are not—  
are if you will, but bloodless—  
why ask happiness of the dead?  
and my heart bled.*

*Ah, could they know  
how violets throw strange fire,  
red and purple and gold,  
how they glow  
gold and purple and red  
where her feet tread.*

## HYMEN

*As from a temple service, tall and dignified,  
with slow pace, each a queen, the sixteen matrons  
from the temple of Hera pass before the curtain  
—a dark purple hung between Ionic columns—  
of the porch or open hall of a palace. Their  
hair is bound as the marble hair of the temple  
Hera. Each wears a crown or diadem of gold.*

*They sing—the music is temple music, deep,  
simple, chanting notes:*

FROM the closed garden  
Where our feet pace  
Back and forth each day,  
This gladiolus white,  
This red, this purple spray—  
Gladiolus tall with dignity  
As yours, lady—we lay  
Before your feet and pray:

Of all the blessings—  
Youth, joy, ecstasy—  
May one gift last

(As the tall gladiolus may  
Outlast the wind-flower,  
Winter-rose or rose),  
One gift above,  
Encompassing all those;

For her, for him,  
For all within these palace walls,  
Beyond the feast,  
Beyond the cry of Hymen and the torch,  
Beyond the night and music  
Echoing through the porch till day.

*The music, with its deep chanting notes, dies away. The curtain hangs motionless in rich, full folds. Then from this background of darkness, dignity and solemn repose, a flute gradually detaches itself, becomes clearer and clearer, pipes alone one shrill, simple little melody.*

*From the distance, four children's voices blend with the flute, and four very little girls pass singly before the curtain, small maids or attendants of the sixteen matrons. Their hair is short and curls at the back of their heads like the hair of the chryselephantine Hermes. They sing:*

Where the first crocus buds unfold  
We found these petals near the cold  
Swift river-bed.

Beneath the rocks where ivy-frond  
Puts forth new leaves to gleam beyond  
Those lately dead:

The very smallest two or three  
Of gold (gold pale as ivory)  
We gathered.

*When the little girls have passed before the curtain, a wood-wind weaves a richer note into the flute melody; then the two blend into one song. But as the wood-wind grows in mellowness and richness, the flute gradually dies away into a secondary theme and the wood-wind alone evolves the melody of a new song.*

*Two by two—like two sets of medallions with twin profiles distinct, one head slightly higher, bent forward a little—the four figures of four slight, rather fragile taller children, are outlined with sharp white contour against the curtain.*

*The hair is smooth against the heads, falling to the shoulders, but slightly waved against the nape of the neck. They are looking down, each at a spray of winter-rose. The tunics fall to the knees in sharp marble folds. They sing:*

Never more will the wind  
Cherish you again,  
Never more will the rain.

Never more  
Shall we find you bright  
In the snow and wind.

The snow is melted,  
The snow is gone,  
And you are flown:

Like a bird out of our hand,  
Like a light out of our heart,  
You are gone.

*As the wistful notes of the wood-wind gradually dies away, there comes a sudden, shrill, swift piping.*

*Free and wild, like the wood-maidens of Artemis, is this last group of four—very straight with heads tossed back. They sing in rich, free, swift notes. They move swiftly before the curtain in contrast to the slow, important pace of the first two groups. Their hair is loose and rayed out like that of the sun-god. They are boyish in shape and gesture. They carry hyacinths in baskets, strapped like quivers to their backs. They reach to draw the flower sprays from the baskets, as the Huntress her arrows.*

*As they dart swiftly to and fro before the curtain, they are youth, they are spring—they are the Chelidonia, their song is the swallow-song of joy:*

Between the hollows  
Of the little hills  
The spring spills blue—  
Turquoise, sapphire, lapis-lazuli—  
On a brown cloth outspread.

Ah see,  
How carefully we lay them now,  
Each hyacinth spray,  
Across the marble floor—  
A pattern your bent eyes  
May trace and follow  
To the shut bridal door.

Lady, our love, our dear,  
Our bride most fair,  
They grew among the hollows  
Of the hills;  
As if the sea had spilled its blue,  
As if the sea had risen  
From its bed,  
And sinking to the level of the shore;  
Left hyacinths on the floor.

*There is a pause. Flute, pipe and wood-wind  
blend in a full, rich movement. There is no defi-  
nite melody but full, powerful rhythm like soft  
but steady wind above forest trees. Into this,  
like rain, gradually creeps the note of strings.*

*As the strings grow stronger and finally dominate the whole, the bride-chorus passes before the curtain. There may be any number in this chorus. The figures—tall young women, clothed in long white tunics—follow one another closely, yet are all distinct like a procession of a temple frieze.*

*The bride in the center is not at first distinguishable from her maidens; but as they begin their song, the maidens draw apart into two groups, leaving the veiled symbolic figure standing alone in the center.*

*The two groups range themselves to right and left like officiating priestesses. The veiled figure stands with her back against the curtain, the others being in profile. Her head is swathed in folds of diaphanous white, through which the features are visible, like the veiled Tanagra.*

*When the song is finished, the group to the bride's left turns about; also the bride, so that all face in one direction. In processional form they pass out, the figure of the bride again merging, not distinguishable from the maidens.*

### *Strophe*

But of her  
Who can say if she is fair?  
Bound with fillet,  
Bound with myrtle



Underneath her flowing veil,  
Only the soft length  
(Beneath her dress)  
Of saffron shoe is bright  
As a great lily-heart  
In its white loveliness.

*Antistrophe*

But of her  
We can say that she is fair.  
We bleached the fillet,  
Brought the myrtle;  
To us the task was set  
Of knotting the fine threads of silk:  
We fastened the veil,  
And over the white foot  
Drew on the painted shoe  
Steeped in Illyrian crocus.

*Strophe*

But of her,  
Who can say if she is fair?  
For her head is covered over  
With her mantle  
White on white,  
Snow on whiter amaranth,  
Snow on hoar-frost,  
Snow on snow,  
Snow on whitest buds of myrrh.

*Antistrophe*

But of her,  
We can say that she is fair;  
For we know underneath  
All the wanness,  
All the heat  
(In her blanched face)  
Of desire  
Is caught in her eyes as fire  
In the dark center leaf  
Of the white Syrian iris.

*The rather hard, hieratic precision of the music—its stately pause and beat—is broken now into irregular lilt and rhythm of strings.*

*Four tall young women, very young matrons, enter in a group. They stand clear and fair, but this little group entirely lacks the austere precision of the procession of maidens just preceding them. They pause in the center of the stage; turn, one three-quarter, two in profile and the fourth full face; they stand, turned as if confiding in each other like a Tanagra group.*

*They sing lightly, their flower trays under their arms.*

Along the yellow sand  
Above the rocks  
The laurel-bushes stand.

Against the shimmering heat  
Each separate leaf  
Is bright and cold,  
And through the bronze  
Of shining bark and wood  
Run the fine threads of gold.

Here in our wicker-trays,  
We bring the first faint blossoming  
Of fragrant bays:

Lady, their blushes shine  
As faint in hue  
As when through petals  
Of a laurel-rose  
The sun shines through,  
And throws a purple shadow  
On a marble vase.

(Ah, love,  
So her fair breasts will shine  
With the faint shadow above.)

*The harp chords become again more regular in simple definite rhythm. The music is not so intense as the bride-chorus; and quieter, more sedate, than the notes preceding the entrance of the last group.*

*Five or six slightly older serene young women enter in processional form; each holding before*

*her, with precise bending of arms, coverlets and linen, carefully folded, as if for the bride couch. The garments are purple, scarlet and deep blue, with edge of gold.*

*They sing to blending of wood-wind and harp.*

From citron-bower be her bed,  
Cut from branch of tree a-flower,  
Fashioned for her maidenhead.

From Lydian apples, sweet of hue,  
Cut the width of board and lathe.  
Carve the feet from myrtle-wood.

Let the palings of her bed  
Be quince and box-wood overlaid  
With the scented bark of yew.

That all the wood in blossoming,  
May calm her heart and cool her blood  
For losing of her maidenhood.

*The wood-winds become more rich and resonant. A tall youth crosses the stage as if seeking the bride door. The music becomes very rich, full of color.*

*The figure itself is a flame, an exaggerated symbol; the hair a flame; the wings, deep red or purple, stand out against the curtains in a*

*contrasting or almost clashing shade of purple. The tunic, again a rich purple or crimson, falls almost to the knees. The knees are bare; the sandals elaborately strapped over and over. The curtain seems a rich purple cloud, the figure, still brighter, like a flamboyant bird, half emerged in the sunset.*

*Love pauses just outside the bride's door with his gift, a tuft of black-purple cyclamen. He sings to the accompaniment of wood-winds, in a rich, resonant voice:*

The crimson cover of her bed  
Is not so rich, nor so deeply bled  
The purple-fish that dyed it red,  
As when in a hot sheltered glen  
There flowered these stalks of cyclamen:

(Purple with honey-points  
Of horns for petals;  
Sweet and dark and crisp,  
As fragrant as her maiden kiss.)

There with his honey-seeking lips  
The bee clings close and warmly sips,  
And seeks with honey-thighs to sway  
And drink the very flower away.

(Ah, stern the petals drawing back;  
Ah rare, ah virginal her breath!)

Crimson, with honey-seeking lips,  
The sun lies hot across his back,  
The gold is flecked across his wings.  
Quivering he sways and quivering clings  
(Ah, rare her shoulders drawing back!)  
One moment, then the plunderer slips  
Between the purple flower-lips.

*Love passes out with a crash of cymbals.  
There is a momentary pause and the music falls  
into its calm, wave-like rhythm.*

*A band of boys passes before the curtain.  
They pass from side to side, crossing and re-  
crossing; but their figures never confuse one an-  
other, the outlines are never blurred. They stand  
out against the curtain with symbolic gesture,  
stooping as if to gather up the wreaths, or sway-  
ing with long stiff branch as if to sweep the fallen  
petals from the floor.*

*There is no marked melody from the instru-  
ments, but the boys' voices, humming lightly as  
they enter, gradually evolve a little dance song.  
There are no words but the lilt up and down of  
the boys' tenor voices.*

*Then, as if they had finished the task of gather-  
ing up the wreaths and sweeping the petals, they  
stand in groups of two before the pillars where  
the torches have been placed. They lift the  
torches from the brackets. They hold them aloft*

*between them, one torch to each two boys. Their figures are cut against the curtain like the simple, triangular design on the base of a vase or frieze—the boys' heads on a level, the torches above them.*

*They sing in clear, half-subdued voices:*

Where love is king,  
Ah, there is little need  
To dance and sing,  
With bridal-torch to flare  
Amber and scatter light  
Across the purple air,  
To sing and dance  
To flute-note and to reed.

Where love is come  
(Ah, love is come indeed!)  
Our limbs are numb  
Before his fiery need;  
With all their glad  
Rapture of speech unsaid,  
Before his fiery lips  
Our lips are mute and dumb.

Ah, sound of reed,  
Ah, flute and trumpet wail,  
Ah, joy decreed—  
The fringes of her veil

Are seared and white;  
Across the flare of light,  
Blinded the torches fail.  
(Ah, love is come indeed!)

*At the end of the song, the torches flicker out and the figures are no longer distinguishable in the darkness. They pass out like shadows. The purple curtain hangs black and heavy.*

*The music dies away and is finally cut short with a few deep, muted chords.*



## DEMETER

### I

MEN, fires, feasts,  
steps of temple, fore-stone, lintel,  
step of white altar, fire and after-fire,  
slaughter before,  
fragment of burnt meat,  
deep mystery, grapple of mind to reach  
the tense thought,  
power and wealth, purpose and prayer alike,  
(men, fires, feasts, temple steps)—useless.

Useless to me who plant  
wide feet on a mighty plinth,  
useless to me who sit,  
wide of shoulder, great of thigh,  
heavy in gold, to press  
gold back against solid back  
of the marble seat:  
useless the dragons wrought on the arms,  
useless the poppy-buds and the gold inset  
of the spray of wheat.

Ah they have wrought me heavy  
and great of limb—

she is slender of waist,  
slight of breast, made of many fashions;  
they have set *her* small feet  
on many a plinth;  
she they have known,  
she they have spoken with,  
she they have smiled upon,  
she they have caught  
and flattered with praise and gifts.

But useless the flattery  
of the mighty power  
they have granted me:  
for I will not stay in her breast,  
the great of limb,  
though perfect the shell they have  
fashioned me, these men!

Do I sit in the market place—  
do I smile, does a noble brow  
bend like the brow of Zeus—  
am I a spouse, his or any,  
am I a woman, or goddess or queen,  
to be met by a god with a smile—and left?

## II

Do you ask for a scroll,  
parchment, oracle, prophecy, precedent;

do you ask for tablets marked with thought  
or words cut deep on the marble surface,  
do you seek measured utterance or the mystic  
trance?

Sleep on the stones of Delphi—  
dare the ledges of Pallas  
but keep me foremost,  
keep me before you, after you, with you,  
never forget when you start  
for the Delphic precipice,  
never forget when you seek Pallas  
and meet in thought  
yourself drawn out from yourself  
like the holy serpent,  
never forget  
in thought or mysterious trance—  
I am greatest and least.

Soft are the hands of Love,  
soft, soft are his feet;  
you who have twined myrtle,  
have you brought crocuses,  
white as the inner  
stript bark of the osier,  
have you set  
black crocus against the black  
locks of another?

### III

Of whom do I speak?  
Many the children of gods  
but first I take  
Bromios, fostering prince,  
lift from the ivy brake, a king.

Enough of the lightning,  
enough of the tales that speak  
of the death of the mother:  
strange tales of a shelter  
brought to the unborn,  
enough of tale, myth, mystery, precedent—  
a child lay on the earth asleep.

Soft are the hands of Love,  
but what soft hands  
clutched at the thorny ground,  
scratched like a small white ferret  
or foraging whippet or hound,  
sought nourishment and found  
only the crackling of ivy,  
dead ivy leaf and the white  
berry, food for a bird,  
no food for this who sought,  
bending small head in a fever,  
whining with little breath.

Ah, small black head,  
ah, the purple ivy bush,  
ah, berries that shook and spilt  
on the form beneath,  
who begot you and left?

Though I begot no man child  
all my days,  
the child of my heart and spirit,  
is the child the gods desert  
alike and the mother in death—  
the unclaimed Dionysos.

#### IV

*What of her—  
mistress of Death?*

Form of a golden wreath  
were my hands that girt her head,  
fingers that strove to meet,  
and met where the whisps escaped  
from the fillet, of tenderest gold,  
small circlet and slim  
were my fingers then.

Now they are wrought of iron  
to wrest from earth  
secrets; strong to protect,

strong to keep back the winter  
when winter tracks too soon  
blanch the forest:  
strong to break dead things,  
the young tree, drained of sap,  
the old tree, ready to drop,  
to lift from the rotting bed  
of leaves, the old  
crumbling pine tree stock,  
to heap bole and knot of fir  
and pine and resinous oak,  
till fire shatter the dark  
and hope of spring  
rise in the hearts of men.

*What of her—  
mistress of Death—  
what of his kiss?*

Ah, strong were his arms to wrest  
slight limbs from the beautiful earth,  
young hands that plucked the first  
buds of the chill narcissus,  
soft fingers that broke  
and fastened the thorny stalk  
with the flower of wild acanthus.

Ah, strong were the arms that took  
(ah, evil the heart and graceless),  
but the kiss was less passionate!

## SIMAETHA

DRENCHED with purple,  
drenched with dye, my wool,  
bind you the wheel-spokes—  
turn, turn, turn my wheel!

Drenched with purple,  
steeped in the red pulp  
of bursting sea-sloes—  
turn, turn, turn my wheel!

(Ah did he think  
I did not know,  
I did not feel—  
what wrack, what weal for him:  
golden one, golden one,  
turn again Aphrodite with the yellow zone,  
I am cursed, cursed, undone!  
Ah and my face, Aphrodite,  
beside your gold,  
is cut out of white stone!)

Laurel blossom and the red seed  
of the red vervain weed,

burn, crackle in the fire,  
burn, crackle for my need!  
Laurel leaf, O fruited  
branch of bay,  
burn, burn away  
thought, memory and hurt!

(Ah when he comes,  
stumbling across my sill,  
will he find me still,  
fragrant as the white privet,  
or as a bone,  
polished in wet and sun,  
worried of wild beaks,  
and of the whelps' teeth—  
worried of flesh,  
left to bleach under the sun,  
white as ash bled of heat,  
white as hail blazing in sheet-lightning,  
white as forked lightning  
rending the sleet?)



## THETIS

### I

ON the paved parapet  
you will step carefully  
from amber stones to onyx  
flecked with violet,  
mingled with light,  
half showing the sea-grass  
and sea-sand underneath,  
reflecting your white feet  
and the gay strap crimson  
as lily-buds of Arion,  
and the gold that binds your feet.

### II

You will pass  
beneath the island disk  
(and myrtle-wood,  
the carved support of it)  
and the white stretch  
of its white beach,  
curved as the moon crescent

or ivory when some fine hand  
chisels it:  
when the sun slips  
through the far edge,  
there is rare amber  
through the sea,  
and flecks of it  
glitter on the dolphin's back  
and jewelled halter  
and harness and bit  
as he sways under it.

## CIRCE

It was easy enough  
to bend them to my wish,  
it was easy enough  
to alter them with a touch,  
but you  
adrift on the great sea,  
how shall I call you back?

Cedar and white ash,  
rock-cedar and sand plants  
and tamarisk  
red cedar and white cedar  
and black cedar from the inmost forest,  
fragrance upon fragrance  
and all of my sea-magic is for nought.

It was easy enough—  
a thought called them  
from the sharp edges of the earth;  
they prayed for a touch,  
they cried for the sight of my face,  
they entreated me

till in pity  
I turned each to his own self.

Panther and panther,  
then a black leopard  
follows close—  
black panther and red  
and a great hound,  
a god-like beast,  
cut the sand in a clear ring  
and shut me from the earth,  
and cover the sea-sound  
with their throats,  
and the sea-roar with their own barks  
and bellowing and snarls,  
and the sea-stars  
and the swirl of the sand,  
and the rock-tamarisk  
and the wind resonance—  
but not your voice.

It is easy enough to call men  
from the edges of the earth.  
It is easy enough to summon them to  
my feet  
with a thought—  
it is beautiful to see the tall panther  
and the sleek deer-hounds  
circle in the dark.

It is easy enough  
to make cedar and white ash fumes  
into palaces  
and to cover the sea-caves  
with ivory and onyx.

But I would give up  
rock-fringes of coral  
and the inmost chamber  
of my island palace  
and my own gifts  
and the whole region  
of my power and magic  
for your glance.

## LEDA

WHERE the slow river  
meets the tide,  
a red swan lifts red wings  
and darker beak,  
and underneath the purple down  
of his soft breast  
uncurls his coral feet.

Through the deep purple  
of the dying heat  
of sun and mist,  
the level ray of sun-beam  
has caressed  
the lily with dark breast,  
and flecked with richer gold  
its golden crest.

Where the slow lifting  
of the tide,  
floats into the river  
and slowly drifts  
among the reeds,

and lifts the yellow flags,  
he floats  
where tide and river meet.

Ah kingly kiss—  
no more regret  
nor old deep memories  
to mar the bliss;  
where the low sedge is thick,  
the gold day-lily  
outspreads and rests  
beneath soft fluttering  
of red swan wings  
and the warm quivering  
of the red swan's breast.

## HIPPOLYTUS TEMPORIZES

I WORSHIP the greatest first—  
(it were sweet, the couch,  
the brighter ripple of cloth  
over the dipped fleece;  
the thought: her bones  
under the flesh are white  
as sand which along a beach  
covers but keeps the print  
of the crescent shapes beneath:  
I thought:  
between cloth and fleece,  
so her body lies.)

I worship first, the great—  
(ah, sweet, your eyes—  
what God, invoked in Crete,  
gave them the gift to part  
as the Sidonian myrtle-flower  
suddenly, wide and swart,  
then swiftly,  
the eye-lids having provoked our hearts—  
as suddenly beat and close.)



I worship the feet, flawless,  
that haunt the hills—  
(ah, sweet, dare I think,  
beneath fetter of golden clasp,  
of the rhythm, the fall and rise  
of yours, carven, slight  
beneath straps of gold that keep  
their slender beauty caught,  
like wings and bodies  
of trapped birds.)

I worship the greatest first—  
(suddenly into my brain—  
the flash of sun on the snow,  
the fringe of light and the drift,  
the crest and the hill-shadow—  
ah, surely now I forget,  
ah splendour, my goddess turns:  
or was it the sudden heat,  
beneath quivering of molten flesh,  
of veins, purple as violets?)

## CUCKOO SONG

AH, bird,  
our love is never spent  
with your clear note,  
nor satiate our soul;  
not song, not wail, not hurt,  
but just a call summons us  
with its simple top-note  
and soft fall;

not to some rarer heaven  
of lilies over-tall,  
nor tuberose set against  
some sun-lit wall,  
but to a gracious  
cedar-palace hall;

not marble set with purple  
hung with roses and tall  
sweet lilies—such  
as the nightingale  
would summon for us  
with her wail—

(surely only unhappiness  
could thrill  
such a rich madrigal!)  
not she, the nightingale  
can fill our souls  
with such a wistful joy as this:

nor, bird, so sweet  
was ever a swallow note—  
not hers, so perfect  
with the wing of lazuli  
and bright breast—  
nor yet the oriole  
filling with melody  
from her fiery throat  
some island-orchard  
in a purple sea.

Ah dear, ah gentle bird,  
you spread warm length  
of crimson wool  
and tinted woven stuff  
for us to rest upon,  
nor numb with ecstasy  
nor drown with death:

only you soothe, make still  
the throbbing of our brain:  
so through her forest trees,

when all her hope was gone  
and all her pain,  
Calypso heard your call—  
across the gathering drift  
of burning cedar-wood,  
across the low-set bed  
of wandering parsley and violet,  
when all her hope was dead.

## THE ISLANDS

### I

WHAT are the islands to me,  
what is Greece,  
what is Rhodes, Samos, Chios,  
what is Paros facing west,  
what is Crete?

What is Samothrace,  
rising like a ship,  
what is Imbros rending the storm-waves  
with its breast?

What is Naxos, Paros, Milos,  
what the circle about Lycia,  
what, the Cyclades'  
white necklace?

What is Greece—  
Sparta, rising like a rock,  
Thebes, Athens,  
what is Corinth?

What is Eubolia  
with its island violets,  
what is Eubolia, spread with grass,  
set with swift shoals,  
what is Crete?

What are the islands to me,  
what is Greece?

## II

What can love of land give to me  
that you have not—  
what do the tall Spartans know,  
and gentler Attic folk?

What has Sparta and her women  
more than this?

What are the islands to me  
if you are lost—  
what is Naxos, Tinos, Andros,  
and Delos, the clasp  
of the white necklace?

## III

What can love of land give to me  
that you have not,

what can love of strife break in me  
that you have not?

Though Sparta enter Athens,  
Thebes wrack Sparta,  
each changes as water,  
salt, rising to wreak terror  
and fall back.

#### IV

“What has love of land given to you  
that I have not?”

I have questioned Tyrians  
where they sat  
on the black ships,  
weighted with rich stuffs,  
I have asked the Greeks  
from the white ships,  
and Greeks from ships whose hulks  
lay on the wet sand, scarlet  
with great beaks.  
I have asked bright Tyrians  
and tall Greeks—  
“what has love of land given you?”  
And they answered—“peace.”

## V

But beauty is set apart,  
beauty is cast by the sea,  
a barren rock,  
beauty is set about  
with wrecks of ships,  
upon our coast, death keeps  
the shallows—death waits  
clutching toward us  
from the deeps.

Beauty is set apart;  
the winds that slash its beach,  
swirl the coarse sand  
upward toward the rocks.

Beauty is set apart  
from the islands  
and from Greece.

## VI

In my garden  
the winds have beaten  
the ripe lilies;  
in my garden, the salt  
has wilted the first flakes  
of young narcissus,



and the lesser hyacinth,  
and the salt has crept  
under the leaves of the white hyacinth.

In my garden  
even the wind-flowers lie flat,  
broken by the wind at last.

## VII

What are the islands to me  
if you are lost,  
what is Paros to me  
if your eyes draw back,  
what is Milos  
if you take fright of beauty,  
terrible, torturous, isolated,  
a barren rock?

What is Rhodes, Crete,  
what is Paros facing west,  
what, white Imbros?

What are the islands to me  
if you hesitate,  
what is Greece if you draw back  
from the terror  
and cold splendour of song  
and its bleak sacrifice?

## AT BAIA

I SHOULD have thought  
in a dream you would have brought  
some lovely, perilous thing,  
orchids piled in a great sheath,  
as who would say (in a dream)  
I send you this,  
who left the blue veins  
of your throat unkissed.

Why was it that your hands  
(that never took mine)  
your hands that I could see  
drift over the orchid heads  
so carefully,  
your hands, so fragile, sure to lift  
so gently, the fragile flower stuff—  
ah, ah, how was it

You never sent (in a dream)  
the very form, the very scent,  
not heavy, not sensuous,  
but perilous—perilous—  
of orchids, piled in a great sheath,

and folded underneath on a bright scroll  
some word:

Flower sent to flower;  
for white hands, the lesser white,  
less lovely of flower leaf,

or

Lover to lover, no kiss,  
no touch, but forever and ever this.

## SEA HEROES

CRASH on crash of the sea,  
straining to wreck men, sea-boards, continents,  
raging against the world, furious,  
stay at last, for against your fury  
and your mad fight,  
the line of heroes stands, god-like:

Akroneos, Oknolos, Elatreus,  
helm-of-boat, loosener-of-helm, dweller-by-sea,  
Nauteus, sea-man,  
Prumneos, stern-of-ship,  
Agchialos, sea-girt,  
Elatreus, oar-shaft:  
lover-of-the-sea, lover-of-the-sea-ebb,  
lover-of-the-swift-sea,  
Ponteus, Proreus, Ooos:  
Anabesneos, one caught between  
wave-shock and wave-shock:  
Eurualos, broad sea-wrack,  
like Ares, man's death,  
and Naubolides, best in shape,  
of all first in size:  
Phaekous, seas' thunderbolt—

ah, crash on crash of great names—  
man-tamer, man's-help, perfect Laodamos:  
and last the sons of great Alkinoos,  
Laodamos, Halios and god-like Clytomeos.

Of all nations, of all cities,  
of all continents,  
she is favoured among the rest,  
for she gives men as great as the sea,  
valorous to the fight,  
to battle against the elements and evil:  
greater even than the sea,  
they live beyond wrack and death of cities,  
and each god-like name spoken  
is as a shrine in a godless place.

But to name you,  
we reverent are breathless,  
weak with pain and old loss,  
and exile and despair—  
our hearts break but to speak  
your name, Oknaleos—  
and may we but call you in the feverish wrack  
of our storm-strewn beach, Eretmeos,  
and our hurt is quiet and our hearts tamed,  
as the sea may yet be tamed,  
and we vow to float great ships,  
named for each hero,  
and oar-blades, cut out of mountain-trees

as such men might have shaped:  
Eretmeos and the sea is swept,  
baffled by the lordly shape,  
Akroneos has pines for his ship's keel;  
to love, to mate the sea?  
Ah there is Ponteos,  
the very deeps roar,  
hailing you dear—  
they clamour to Ponteos,  
and to Proeos  
leap, swift to kiss, to curl, to creep,  
lover to mistress.

What wave, what love, what foam,  
for Ooos who moves swift as the sea?  
Ah stay, my heart, the weight  
of lovers, of loneliness  
drowns me,  
alas that their very names  
so press to break my heart  
with heart-sick weariness,  
what would they be,  
the very gods,  
rearing their mighty length  
beside the unharvested sea?

FRAGMENT 113

*"Neither honey nor tea for me."*

—SAPPHO.

NOT honey,  
not the plunder of the bee  
from meadow or sand-flower  
or mountain bush;  
from winter-flower or shoot  
born of the later heat:  
not honey, not the sweet  
stain on the lips and teeth:  
not honey, not the deep  
plunge of soft belly  
and the clinging of the gold-edged  
pollen-dusted feet;

though rapture blind my eyes,  
and hunger crisp  
dark and inert my mouth,  
not honey, not the south,  
not the tall stalk  
of red twin-lilies,  
nor light branch of fruit tree  
caught in flexible light branch;

not honey, not the south;  
ah flower of purple iris,  
flower of white;  
or of the iris, withering the grass—  
for fleck of the sun's fire,  
gathers such heat and power,  
that shadow-print is light,  
cast through the petals  
of the yellow iris flower;

not iris—old desire—old passion—  
old forgetfulness—old pain—  
not this, nor any flower,  
but if you turn again,  
seek strength of arm and throat,  
touch as the god;  
neglect the lyre-note;  
knowing that you shall feel,  
about the frame,  
no trembling of the string  
but heat, more passionate  
of bone and the white shell  
and fiery tempered steel.



## EVADNE

I FIRST tasted under Apollo's lips  
love and love sweetness,  
I Evadne;  
my hair is made of crisp violets  
or hyacinth which the wind combs back  
across some rock shelf;  
I Evadne  
was mate of the god of light.

His hair was crisp to my mouth  
as the flower of the crocus,  
across my cheek,  
cool as the silver cress  
on Eros bank;  
between my chin and throat  
his mouth slipped over and over.

Still between my arm and shoulder,  
I feel the brush of his hair,  
and my hands keep the gold they took  
as they wandered over and over  
that great arm-full of yellow flowers.

## SONG

YOU are as gold  
as the half-ripe grain  
that merges to gold again,  
as white as the white rain  
that beats through  
the half-opened flowers  
of the great flower tufts  
thick on the black limbs  
of an Illyrian apple bough.

Can honey distill such fragrance  
as your bright hair—  
for your face is as fair as rain,  
yet as rain that lies clear  
on white honey-comb,  
lends radiance to the white wax,  
so your hair on your brow  
casts light for a shadow.

## WHY HAVE YOU SOUGHT?

WHY have you sought the Greeks, Eros,  
when such delight was yours  
in the far depth of sky:  
there you could note bright ivory  
take colour where she bent her face,  
and watch fair gold shed gold  
on radiant surface of porch and pillar:  
and ivory and bright gold,  
polished and lustrous grow faint  
beside that wondrous flesh  
and print of her foot-hold:  
Love, why do you tempt the Grecian porticoes?

Here men are bent with thought  
and women waste fair moments  
gathering lint and pricking coloured stuffs  
to mar their breasts,  
while she, adored,  
wastes not her fingers,  
worn of fire and sword,  
wastes not her touch  
on linen and fine thread,  
wastes not her head

in thought and pondering,  
Love, why have you sought the horde  
of spearsmen, why the tent  
Achilles pitched beside the river-ford?

## WHITE WORLD

THE whole white world is ours,  
and the world, purple with rose-bays,  
bays, bush on bush,  
group, thicket, hedge and tree,  
dark islands in a sea  
of grey-green olive or wild white-olive,  
cut with the sudden cypress shafts,  
in clusters, two or three,  
or with one slender, single cypress-tree.

Slid from the hill,  
as crumbling snow-peaks slide,  
citron on citron fill  
the valley, and delight  
waits till our spirits tire  
of forest, grove and bush  
and purple flower of the laurel-tree.

Yet not one wearies,  
joined is each to each  
in happiness complete  
with bush and flower:

ours is the wind-breath  
at the hot noon-hour,  
ours is the bee's soft belly  
and the blush of the rose-petal,  
lifted, of the flower.

## PHAEDRA

THINK, O my soul,  
of the red sand of Crete;  
think of the earth; the heat  
burnt fissures like the great  
backs of the temple serpents;  
think of the world you knew;  
as the tide crept, the land  
burned with a lizard-blue  
where the dark sea met the sand.

Think, O my soul—  
what power has struck you blind—  
is there no desert-root, no forest-berry  
pine-pitch or knot of fir  
known that can help the soul  
caught in a force, a power,  
passionless, not its own?

*So I scatter, so implore  
Gods of Crete, summoned before  
with slighter craft;  
ah, hear my prayer:*

*Grant to my soul  
the body that it wore,  
trained to your thought;  
that kept and held your power,  
as the petal of black poppy,  
the opiate of the flower.*

*For art undreamt in Crete,  
strange art and dire,  
in counter-charm prevents my charm  
limits my power:  
pine-cone I heap,  
grant answer to my prayer.*

No more, my soul—  
as the black cup, sullen and dark with fire,  
burns till beside it, noon's bright heat  
is withered, filled with dust—  
and into that noon-heat  
grown drab and stale,  
suddenly wind and thunder and swift rain,  
till the scarlet flower is wrecked  
in the slash of the white hail.

The poppy that my heart was,  
formed to bind all mortals,  
made to strike and gather hearts  
like flame upon an altar,  
fades and shrinks, a red leaf  
drenched and torn in the cold rain.



## SHE CONTRASTS WITH HERSELF HIPPOLYTA

CAN flame beget white steel—  
ah no, it could not take  
within my reins its shelter;  
steel must seek steel,  
or hate make out of joy  
a whet-stone for a sword;  
sword against flint,  
Theseus sought Hippolyta;  
she yielded not nor broke,  
sword upon stone,  
from the clash leapt a spark,  
Hippolytus, born of hate.

What did she think  
when all her strength  
was twisted for his bearing;  
did it break,  
even within her sheltered heart, a song,  
some whispered note,  
distant and faint as this:

*Love that I bear  
within my breast  
how is my armour melted  
how my heart:  
as an oak-tree  
that keeps beneath the snow,  
the young bark fresh  
till the spring cast  
from off its shoulders  
the white snow  
so does my armour melt.*

*Love that I bear  
within my heart, O speak;  
tell how beneath the serpent-spotted shell,  
the cygnets wait,  
how the soft owl  
opens and flicks with pride,  
eye-lids of great bird-eyes,  
when underneath its breast  
the owlets shrink and turn.*

You have the power,  
(then did she say) Artemis,  
benignity to grant  
forgiveness that I gave  
no quarter to an enemy who cast  
his armour on the forest-moss,  
and took, unmatched in an uneven contest,

Hippolyta who relented not,  
returned and sought no kiss.

Then did she pray: Artemis,  
grant that no flower  
be grafted alien on a broken stalk,  
no dark flame-laurel on the stricken crest  
of a wild mountain-poplar;  
grant in my thought,  
I never yield but wait,  
entreating cold white river,  
mountain-pool and salt:  
let all my veins be ice,  
until they break  
(strength of white beach,  
rock of mountain land,  
forever to you, Artemis, dedicate)  
from out my reins,  
those small, cold hands.

## SHE REBUKES HIPPOLYTA

WAS she so chaste?

Swift and a broken rock  
clatters across the steep shelf  
of the mountain slope,  
sudden and swift  
and breaks as it clatters down  
into the hollow breach  
of the dried water-course:  
far and away  
(though fire I see it,  
and smoke of the dead, withered stalks  
of the wild cistus-brush)  
Hippolyta, frail and wild,  
galloping up the slope  
between great boulder and rock  
and group and cluster of rock.

Was she so chaste,  
(I see it, sharp, this vision,  
and each fleck on the horse's flanks  
of foam, and bridle and bit,  
silver, and the straps,

wrought with their perfect art,  
and the sun,  
striking athwart the silver-work,  
and the neck, strained forward, ears alert,  
and the head of a girl  
flung back and her throat.)

Was she so chaste—  
(Ah, burn my fire, I ask  
out of the smoke-ringed darkness  
enclosing the flaming disk  
of my vision)  
I ask for a voice to answer:  
was she chaste?

Who can say—  
the broken ridge of the hills  
was the line of a lover's shoulder,  
his arm-turn, the path to the hills,  
the sudden leap and swift thunder  
of mountain boulders, his laugh.

She was mad—  
as no priest, no lover's cult  
could grant madness;  
the wine that entered her throat  
with the touch of the mountain rocks  
was white, intoxicant:  
she, the chaste,

was betrayed by the glint  
of light on the hills,  
the granite splinter of rocks,  
the touch of the stone  
where heat melts  
toward the shadow-side of the rocks.

## EGYPT

EGYPT had cheated us,  
for Egypt took  
through guile and craft  
our treasure and our hope,  
Egypt had maimed us,  
offered dream for life,  
an opiate for a kiss,  
and death for both.

White poison flower we loved  
and the black spike  
of an ungarnered bush—  
(a spice—or without taste—  
we wondered—then we asked  
others to take and sip  
and watched their death)  
Egypt we loved, though hate  
should have withheld our touch.

Egypt had given us knowledge,  
and we took, blindly,  
through want of heart,

what Egypt brought;  
knowing all poison,  
what was that or this,  
more or less perilous,  
than this or that.

We pray you, Egypt,  
by what perverse fate,  
has poison brought with knowledge,  
given us this—  
not days of trance,  
shadow, fore-doom of death,  
but passionate grave thought,  
belief enhanced,  
ritual returned and magic;

Even in the uttermost black pit  
of the forbidden knowledge,  
wisdom's glance,  
the grey eyes following  
in the mid-most desert—  
great shaft of rose,  
fire shed across our path,  
upon the face grown grey, a light,  
Hellas re-born from death.



## PRAYER

WHITE, O white face—  
from disenchanted days  
wither alike dark rose  
and fiery bays:  
no gift within our hands,  
nor strength to praise,  
only defeat and silence;  
though we lift hands, disenchanted,  
of small strength, nor raise  
branch of the laurel  
or the light of torch,  
but fold the garment  
on the riven locks,  
yet hear, all-merciful, and touch  
the fore-head, dim, unlit of pride and thought,  
Mistress—be near!

Give back the glamour to our will,  
the thought; give back the tool,  
the chisel; once we wrought  
things not unworthy,  
sandal and steel-clasp;

silver and steel, the coat  
with white leaf-pattern  
at the arm and throat:  
silver and metal, hammered for the ridge  
of shield and helmet-rim;  
white silver with the darker hammered in,  
belt, staff and magic spear-shaft  
with the gilt spark at the point and hilt.

## HELIOS

HELIOS makes all things right:—  
night brands and chokes  
as if destruction broke  
over furze and stone and crop  
of myrtle-shoot and field-wort,  
destroyed with flakes of iron,  
the bracken-stems,  
where tender roots were sown,  
blight, chaff and waste  
of darkness to choke and drown.

A curious god to find,  
yet in the end faithful;  
bitter, the Kyprian's feet—  
ah flecks of whited clay,  
great hero, vaunted lord—  
ah petal, dust and wind-fall  
on the ground—queen awaiting queen.

Better the weight, they tell,  
the helmet's beaten shell,  
Athene's riven steel,

caught over the white skull,  
Athene sets to heal  
the few who merit it.

Yet even then, what help,  
should he not turn and note  
the height of forehead and the mark  
of conquest,  
draw near and try the helmet;  
to left—reset the crown  
Athene weighted down,  
or break with a light touch  
mayhap the steel set to protect;  
to slay or heal.

A treacherous god, they say,  
yet who would wait to test  
justice or worth or right,  
when through a fetid night  
is wafted faint and nearer—  
then straight as point of steel  
to one who courts swift death,  
scent of Hesperidean orange-spray.

*HELIODORA*  
AND OTHER POEMS

## NOTE

The poem *Lais* has in italics a translation of the Plato epigram in the Greek Anthology. *Heliodora* has in italics the two Meleager epigrams from the Anthology. In *Nossis* is the translation of the opening lines of the Garland of Meleager and the poem of Nossis herself in the Greek Anthology. The foul Sappho fragments are re-worked freely. The *Ion* is a translation of the latter part of the first long chorus of the *Ion* of Euripides.

## WASH OF COLD RIVER

*Wash of cold river  
in a glacial land,  
Ionian water,  
chill, snow-ribbed sand,  
drift of rare flowers,  
clear, with delicate shell-  
like leaf enclosing  
frozen lily-leaf,  
camellia texture,  
colder than a rose;*

*wind-flower  
that keeps the breath  
of the north-wind—  
these and none other;*

*intimate thoughts and kind  
reach out to share  
the treasure of my mind,  
intimate hands and dear  
draw garden-ward and sea-ward  
all the sheer rapture*

*that I would take  
to mould a clear  
and frigid statue;*

*rare, of pure texture,  
beautiful space and line,  
marble to grace  
your inaccessible shrine.*



## HOLY SATYR

Most holy Satyr,  
like a goat,  
with horns and hooves  
to match thy coat  
of russet brown,  
I make leaf-circlets  
and a crown of honey-flowers  
for thy throat;  
where the amber petals  
drip to ivory,  
I cut and slip  
each stiffened petal  
in the rift  
of carven petal;  
honey horn  
has wed the bright  
virgin petal of the white  
flower cluster: lip to lip  
let them whisper,  
let them lilt, quivering.

Most holy Satyr,  
like a goat,

hear this our song,  
accept our leaves,  
love-offering,  
return our hymn,  
like echo fling  
a sweet song,  
answering note for note.

## LAIS

LET her who walks in Paphos  
take the glass,  
let Paphos take the mirror  
and the work of frosted fruit,  
gold apples set  
with silver apple-leaf,  
white leaf of silver  
wrought with vein of gilt.

Let Paphos lift the mirror,  
let her look  
into the polished centre of the disk.

Let Paphos take the mirror;  
did she press  
flowerlet of flame-flower  
to the lustrous white  
of the white forehead?  
did the dark veins beat  
a deeper purple  
than the wine-deep tint  
of the dark flower?

Did she deck black hair  
one evening, with the winter-white  
flower of the winter-berry,  
did she look (reft of her lover)  
at a face gone white  
under the chaplet  
of white virgin-breath?

Lais, exultant, tyrannizing Greece,  
Lais who kept her lovers in the porch,  
lover on lover waiting,  
(but to creep  
where the robe brushed the threshold  
where still sleeps Lais)  
so she creeps, Lais,  
to lay her mirror at the feet  
of her who reigns in Paphos.

Lais has left her mirror  
for she sees no longer in its depth  
the Lais' self  
that laughed exultant  
tyrannizing Greece.

Lais has left her mirror,  
for she weeps no longer,  
finding in its depth,  
a face, but other  
than dark flame and white  
feature of perfect marble.

*Lais has left her mirror,  
(so one wrote)  
to her who reigns in Paphos;  
Lais who laughed a tyrant over Greece,  
Lais who turned the lovers from the porch,  
that swarm for whom now  
Lais has no use;  
Lais is now no lover of the glass,  
seeing no more the face as once it was,  
wishing to see that face and finding this.*

## HELIODORA

HE and I sought together,  
over the spattered table,  
rhymes and flowers,  
gifts for a name.

He said, among others,  
I will bring  
(and the phrase was just and good,  
but not as good as mine,)  
“the narcissus that loves the rain.”

We strove for a name,  
while the light of the lamps burnt thin  
and the outer dawn came in,  
a ghost, the last at the feast  
or the first,  
to sit within  
with the two that remained  
to quibble in flowers and verse  
over a girl's name.

He said, “the rain, loving,”  
I said, “the narcissus, drunk,  
drunk with the rain.”

Yet I had lost  
for he said,  
"the rose, the lover's gift,  
is loved of love,"  
he said it,  
"loved of love;"  
I waited, even as he spoke,  
to see the room filled with a light,  
as when in winter  
the embers catch in a wind  
when a room is dank;  
so it would be filled, I thought,  
our room with a light  
when he said  
(and he said it first,)  
"the rose, the lover's delight,  
is loved of love,"  
but the light was the same.

Then he caught,  
seeing the fire in my eyes,  
my fire, my fever, perhaps,  
for he leaned  
with the purple wine  
stained on his sleeve,  
and said this:  
"did you ever think  
a girl's mouth  
caught in a kiss,

is a lily that laughs?"

I had not.

I saw it now

as men must see it forever afterwards;

no poet could write again,

"the red-lily,

a girl's laugh caught in a kiss;"

it was his to pour in the vat

from which all poets dip and quaff,

for poets are brothers in this.

So I saw the fire in his eyes,

it was almost my fire,

(he was younger,)

I saw the face so white,

my heart beat,

it was almost my phrase;

I said, "surprise the muses,

take them by surprise;

it is late,

rather it is dawn-rise,

those ladies sleep, the nine,

our own king's mistresses."

A name to rhyme,

flowers to bring to a name,

what was one girl faint and shy,

with eyes like the myrtle,



(I said: "her underlids  
are rather like myrtle,")  
to vie with the nine?

Let him take the name,  
he had the rhymes,  
"the rose, loved of love,  
the lily, a mouth that laughs,"  
he had the gift,  
"the scented crocus,  
the purple hyacinth,"  
what was one girl to the nine?

He said:

"I will make her a wreath;"

he said:

"I will write it thus:

*I will bring you the lily that laughs,  
I will twine  
with soft narcissus, the myrtle,  
sweet crocus, white violet,  
the purple hyacinth, and last,  
the rose, loved-of-love,  
that these may drip on your hair  
the less soft flowers,  
may mingle sweet with the sweet  
of Heliodora's locks,  
myrrh-curved."*

(He wrote myrrh-curved,  
I think, the first.)

I said:

"they sleep, the nine,"  
when he shouted swift and passionate:  
"*that* for the nine!  
above the hills  
the sun is about to wake,  
*and to-day white violets  
shine beside white lilies  
adrift on the mountain side;  
to-day the narcissus opens  
that loves the rain.*"

I watched him to the door,  
catching his robe  
as the wine-bowl crashed to the floor,  
spilling a few wet lees,  
(ah, his purple hyacinth!)

I saw him out of the door,  
I thought:  
there will never be a poet  
in all the centuries after this,  
who will dare write,  
after my friend's verse,  
"a girl's mouth  
is a lily kissed."

## HELEN

ALL Greece hates  
the still eyes in the white face,  
the lustre as of olives  
where she stands,  
and the white hands.

All Greece reviles  
the wan face when she smiles,  
hating it deeper still  
when it grows wan and white,  
remembering past enchantments  
and past ills.

Greece sees unmoved,  
God's daughter, born of love,  
the beauty of cool feet  
and slenderest knees,  
could love indeed the maid,  
only if she were laid,  
white ash amid funereal cypresses.

## NOSSIS

I THOUGHT to hear him speak  
the girl might rise  
and make the garden silver,  
as the white moon breaks,  
“Nossis,” he cried, “a flame.”

I said:  
“a girl that’s dead  
some hundred years;  
a poet—what of that?  
for in the islands,  
in the haunts of Greek Ionia,  
Rhodes and Cyprus,  
girls are cheap.”

I said, to test his mood,  
to make him rage or laugh or sing or weep,  
“in Greek Ionia and in Cyprus,  
many girls are found  
with wreaths and apple-branches.”

“Only a hundred years or two or three,  
has she lain dead

yet men forget;"  
he said,  
"I want a garden,"  
and I thought  
he wished to make a terrace on the hill,  
bend the stream to it,  
set out daffodils,  
plant Phrygian violets,  
such was his will and whim,  
I thought,  
to name and watch each flower.

His was no garden  
bright with Tyrian violets,  
his was a shelter  
wrought of flame and spirit,  
and as he flung her name  
against the dark,  
I thought the iris-flowers  
that lined the path  
must be the ghost of Nossis.

*"Who made the wreath,  
for what man was it wrought?  
speak, fashioned all of fruit-buds,  
song, my loveliest,  
say Meleager brought to Diocles,  
(a gift for that enchanting friend)  
memories with names of poets.*

*He sought for Moero, lilies,  
and those many,  
red-lilies for Anyte,  
for Sappho, roses,  
with those few, he caught  
that breath of the sweet-scented  
leaf of iris,  
the myrrh-iris,  
to set beside the tablet  
and the wax  
which Love had burnt,  
when scarred across by Nossis:"*

when she wrote:

*"I Nossis stand by this:  
I state that love is sweet:  
if you think otherwise  
assert what beauty  
or what charm  
after the charm of love,  
retains its grace?"*

*"Honey," you say:  
honey? I say "I spit  
honey out of my mouth:  
nothing is second-best  
after the sweet of Eros."*

*I Nossis stand and state  
that he whom Love neglects  
has naught, no flower, no grace,  
who lacks that rose, her kiss."*

I thought to hear him speak  
the girl might rise  
and make the garden silver  
as the white moon breaks,  
"Nossis," he cried, "a flame."

## CENTAUR SONG

Now that the day is done,  
now that the night creeps soft  
and dims the chestnut clusters'  
radiant spike of flower,  
O sweet, till dawn  
break through the branches  
of our orchard-garden,  
rest in this shelter  
of the osier-wood and thorn.

They fall,  
the apple-flowers;  
nor softer grace has Aphrodite  
in the heaven afar,  
nor at so fair a pace  
open the flower-petals  
as your face bends down,  
while, breath on breath,  
your mouth wanders  
from my mouth o'er my face.

What have I left  
to bring you in this place,



already sweet with violets?  
(those you brought  
with swathes of earliest grass,  
forest and meadow balm,  
flung from your giant arms  
for us to rest upon.)

Fair are these petals  
broken by your feet;  
your horse's hooves  
tread softer than a deer's;  
your eyes, startled,  
are like the deer eyes  
while your heart  
trembles more than the deer.

O earth, O god,  
O forest, stream or river,  
what shall I bring  
that all the day hold back,  
that Dawn remember Love  
and rest upon her bed,  
and Zeus, forgetful not of Danæ or Maia,  
bid the stars shine forever.

## THETIS

HE had asked for immortal life  
in the old days and had grown old,  
now he had aged apace,  
he asked for his youth,  
and I, Thetis, granted him

freedom under the sea  
drip and welter of weeds,  
the drift of the fringing grass,  
the gift of the never-withering moss,  
and the flowering reed,

and most,  
beauty of fifty nereids,  
sisters of nine,  
I one of their least,  
yet great and a goddess,  
granted Pelius,

love under the sea,  
beauty, grace infinite:

so I crept, at last,  
a crescent, a curve of a wave,  
(a man would have thought,  
had he watched for his nets  
on the beach)  
a dolphin, a glistening fish,  
that burnt and caught for its light,  
the light of the undercrest  
of the lifting tide,  
a fish with silver for breast,  
with no light but the light  
of the sea it reflects.

Little he would have guessed,  
(had such a one  
watched by his nets,)  
that a goddess flung from the crest  
of the wave the blue of its own  
bright tress of hair,  
the blue of the painted stuff  
it wore for dress.

No man would have known save he,  
whose coming I sensed as I strung  
my pearl and agate and pearl,  
to mark the beat and the stress  
of the lilt of my song.

*Who dreams of a son,  
save one,*

*childless, having no bright  
face to flatter its own,  
who dreams of a son?*

*Nereids under the sea,  
my sisters, fifty and one,  
(counting myself)  
they dream of a child  
of water and sea,  
with hair of the softest,  
to lie along the curve  
of fragile, tiny bones,  
yet more beautiful each than each,  
hair more bright and long,  
to rival its own.*

*Nereids under the wave,  
who dreams of a son  
save I, Thetis, alone?*

*Each would have for a child,  
a stray self, furtive and wild,  
to dive and leap to the wind,  
to wheedle and coax  
the stray birds bright and bland  
of foreign strands,  
to crawl and stretch on the sands,  
each would have for its own,  
a daughter for child.*

*Who dreams, who sings of a son?  
I, Thetis, alone.*

When I had finished my song,  
and dropped the last seed-pearl,  
and flung the necklet  
about my throat  
and found it none too bright,  
not bright enough nor pale  
enough, not like the moon that creeps  
beneath the sea,  
between the lift of crest and crest,  
had tried it on  
and found it not  
quite fair enough  
to fill the night  
of my blue folds of bluest dress  
with moon for light,  
I cast the beads aside and leapt,  
myself all blue  
with no bright gloss  
of pearls for crescent light;

but one alert, all blue and wet,  
I flung myself, an arrow's flight,  
straight upward  
through the blue of night  
that was my palace wall,  
and crept to where I saw the mark  
of feet, a rare foot-fall:

Achilles' sandal on the beach,  
could one mistake?  
perhaps a lover or a nymph,  
lost from the tangled fern and brake,  
that lines the upper shelf of land,  
perhaps a goddess or a nymph  
might so mistake

Achilles' footprint for the trace  
of a bright god alert to track  
the panther where he slinks for thirst  
across the sand;

perhaps a goddess or a nymph,  
might think a god had crossed the track  
of weed and drift,  
had broken here this stem of reed,  
had turned this sea-shell to the light:

so she must stoop, this goddess girl,  
or nymph, with crest of blossoming wood  
about her hair for cap or crown,  
must stoop and kneel and bending down,  
must kiss the print of such a one.

Not I, the mother, Thetis self,  
I stretched and lay, a river's slim  
dark length,  
a rivulet where it leaves the wood,  
and meets the sea,  
I lay along the burning sand,  
a river's blue.

## AT ITHACA

OVER and back,  
the long waves crawl  
and track the sand with foam;  
night darkens and the sea  
takes on that desperate tone  
of dark that wives put on  
when all their love is done.

Over and back,  
the tangled thread falls slack,  
over and up and on;  
over and all is sewn;  
now while I bind the end,  
I wish some fiery friend  
would sweep impetuously  
these fingers from the loom.

My weary thoughts  
play traitor to my soul,  
just as the toil is over;  
swift while the woof is whole,  
turn now my spirit, swift,  
and tear the pattern there,  
the flowers so deftly wrought,

the border of sea-blue,  
the sea-blue coast of home.

The web was over-fair,  
that web of pictures there,  
enchantments that I thought  
he had, that I had lost;  
weaving his happiness  
within the stitching frame,  
weaving his fire and fame,  
I thought my work was done,  
I prayed that only one  
of those that I had spurned,  
might stoop and conquer this  
long waiting with a kiss.

But each time that I see  
my work so beautifully  
inwoven and would keep  
the picture and the whole,  
Athene steels my soul,  
slanting across my brain,  
I see as shafts of rain  
his chariot and his shafts,  
I see the arrows fall,  
I see my lord who moves  
like Hector, lord of love,  
I see him matched with fair  
bright rivals and I see  
those lesser rivals flee.



## WE TWO

WE two are left:  
I with small grace reveal  
distaste and bitterness;  
you with small patience  
take my hands;  
though effortless,  
you scald their weight  
as a bowl, lined with embers,  
wherein droop  
great petals of white rose,  
forced by the heat  
too soon to break.

We two are left:  
as a blank wall, the world,  
earth and the men who talk,  
saying their space of life  
is good and gracious,  
with eyes blank  
as that blank surface  
their ignorance mistakes  
for final shelter  
and a resting-place.

We two remain:  
yet by what miracle,  
searching within the tangles of my brain,  
I ask again,  
have we two met within  
this maze of dædal paths  
in-wound mid grievous stone,  
where once I stood alone?

## FRAGMENT THIRTY-SIX

*I know not what to do:  
my mind is divided.*

—SAPPHO.

I KNOW not what to do,  
my mind is reft:  
is song's gift best?  
is love's gift loveliest?  
I know not what to do,  
now sleep has pressed  
weight on your eyelids.

Shall I break your rest,  
devouring, eager?  
is love's gift best?  
nay, song's the loveliest:  
yet were you lost,  
what rapture  
could I take from song?  
what song were left?

I know not what to do:  
to turn and slake

the rage that burns,  
with my breath burn  
and trouble your cool breath?  
so shall I turn and take  
snow in my arms?  
(is love's gift best?)  
yet flake on flake  
of snow were comfortless,  
did you lie wondering,  
wakened yet unawake.

Shall I turn and take  
comfortless snow within my arms?  
press lips to lips  
that answer not,  
press lips to flesh  
that shudders not nor breaks?

Is love's gift best?  
shall I turn and slake  
all the wild longing?  
O I am eager for you!  
as the Pleiads shake  
white light in whiter water  
so shall I take you?

My mind is quite divided,  
my minds hesitate,  
so perfect matched,

I know not what to do:  
each strives with each  
as two white wrestlers  
standing for a match,  
ready to turn and clutch  
yet never shake muscle nor nerve  
nor tendon;  
so my mind waits  
to grapple with my mind,  
yet I lie quiet,  
I would seem at rest.

I know not what to do:  
strain upon strain,  
sound surging upon sound  
makes my brain blind;  
as a wave-line may wait to fall  
yet (waiting for its falling)  
still the wind may take  
from off its crest,  
white flake on flake of foam,  
that rises,  
seeming to dart and pulse  
and rend the light,  
so my mind hesitates  
above the passion  
quivering yet to break,  
so my mind hesitates

above my mind,  
listening to 'song's delight.

I know not what to do:  
will the sound break,  
rending the night  
with rift on rift of rose  
and scattered light?  
will the sound break at last  
as the wave hesitant,  
or will the whole night pass  
and I lie listening awake?

## FLUTE SONG

LITTLE scavenger away,  
touch not the door,  
beat not the portal down,  
cross not the sill,  
silent until  
my song, bright and shrill,  
breathes out its lay.

Little scavenger avaunt,  
tempt me with jeer and taunt,  
yet you will wait to-day;  
for it were surely ill  
to mock and shout and revel;  
it were more fit to tell  
with flutes and calathes,  
your mother's praise.

## AFTER TROY

WE flung against their gods,  
invincible, clear hate;  
we fought;  
frantic, we flung the last  
imperious, desperate shaft

and lost:  
we knew the loss  
before they ever guessed  
fortune had tossed to them  
her favour and her whim;  
but how were we depressed?  
we lost yet as we pressed  
our spearsmen on their best,  
we knew their line invincible  
because there fell  
on them no shiverings  
of the white enchantress,  
radiant Aphrodite's spell:

we hurled our shafts of passion,  
noblest hate,



and knew their cause was blest,  
and knew their gods were nobler,  
better taught in skill,  
subtler with wit of thought,  
yet had it been God's will  
that *they* not we should fall,  
we know those fields had bled  
with roses lesser red.

## CASSANDRA

*O Hymen king.*

HYMEN, O Hymen king,  
what bitter thing is this?  
what shaft, tearing my heart?  
what scar, what light, what fire  
searing my eye-balls and my eyes with flame?  
nameless, O spoken name,  
king, lord, speak blameless Hymen.

Why do you blind my eyes?  
why do you dart and pulse  
till all the dark is home,  
then find my soul  
and ruthless draw it back?  
scaling the scaleless,  
opening the dark?  
speak, nameless, power and might;  
when will you leave me quite?  
when will you break my wings  
or leave them utterly free  
to scale heaven endlessly?

A bitter, broken thing,  
my heart, O Hymen lord,  
yet neither drought nor sword  
baffles men quite,  
why must they feign to fear  
my virgin glance?  
feigned utterly or real  
why do they shrink?  
my trance frightens them,  
breaks the dance,  
empties the market place;  
if I but pass they fall  
back, frantically;  
must always people mock?  
unless they shrink and reel  
as in the temple  
at your uttered will.

O Hymen king,  
lord, greatest, power, might,  
look for my face is dark,  
burnt with your light,  
your fire, O Hymen lord;  
is there none left  
can equal me  
in ecstasy, desire?  
is there none left  
can bear with me  
the kiss of your white fire?

is there not one,  
Phrygian or frenzied Greek,  
poet, song-swept, or bard,  
one meet to take from me  
this bitter power of song,  
one fit to speak, Hymen,  
your praises, lord?

May I not wed  
as you have wed?  
may it not break, beauty,  
from out my hands, my head, my feet?  
may Love not lie beside me  
till his heat  
burn me to ash?  
may he not comfort me, then,  
spent of all that fire and heat,  
still, ashen-white and cool  
as the wet laurels,  
white, before your feet  
step on the mountain-slope,  
before your fiery hand  
lift up the mantle  
covering flower and land,  
as a man lifts,  
O Hymen, from his bride,  
(cowering with woman eyes,) the veil?  
O Hymen lord, be kind.

## EPIGRAMS

### I

O RUTHLESS, perilous, imperious hate,  
you can not thwart  
the promptings of my soul,  
you can not weaken nay nor dominate  
Love that is mateless,  
Love the rite,  
the whole measure of being:  
would you crush with bondage?  
nay, you would love me not  
were I your slave.

### 2

Torture me not with this or that or this,  
Love is my master,  
you his lesser self;  
while you are Love,  
I love you generously,  
be Eros,  
not a tyrannous, bitter mate:

Love has no charm  
when Love is swept to earth:  
you'd make a lop-winged god,  
frozen and contrite,  
of god up-darting,  
winged for passionate flight.

## FRAGMENT FORTY

*Love . . . bitter-sweet.*

—SAPPHO.

### I

KEEP love and he wings  
with his bow,  
up, mocking us,  
keep love and he taunts us  
and escapes.

Keep love and he sways apart  
in another world,  
outdistancing us.

Keep love and he mocks,  
ah, bitter and sweet,  
your sweetness is more cruel  
than your hurt.

Honey and salt,  
fire burst from the rocks

to meet fire  
spilt from Hesperus.

Fire darted aloft and met fire:  
in that moment  
love entered us.

2

Could Eros be kept?  
he were prisoned long since  
and sick with imprisonment;  
could Eros be kept?  
others would have broken  
and crushed out his life.

Could Eros be kept?  
we too sinning, by Kypris,  
might have prisoned him outright.

Could Eros be kept?  
nay, thank him and the bright goddess  
that he left us.

3

Ah, love is bitter and sweet,  
but which is more sweet,  
the sweetness



or the bitterness?  
none has spoken it.

Love is bitter,  
but can salt taint sea-flowers,  
grief, happiness?

Is it bitter to give back  
love to your lover  
if he crave it?

Is it bitter to give back  
love to your lover  
if he wish it  
for a new favourite?  
who can say,  
or is it sweet?

Is it sweet  
to possess utterly?  
or is it bitter,  
bitter as ash?

4

I had thought myself frail;  
a petal,  
with light equal  
on leaf and under-leaf.

I had thought myself frail;  
a lamp,  
shell, ivory or crust of pearl,  
about to fall shattered,  
with flame spent.

I cried:  
"I must perish,  
I am deserted,  
an outcast, desperate  
in this darkness,"  
(such fire rent me with Hesperus,)  
then the day broke.

5

What need of a lamp  
when day lightens us,  
what need to bind love  
when love stands  
with such radiant wings  
over us?

What need—  
yet to sing love,  
love must first shatter us.

## TOWARD THE PIRÆUS

*Slay with your eyes, Greek,  
men over the face of the earth,  
slay with your eyes, the host,  
puny, passionless, weak.*

*Break as the ranks of steel  
broke when the Persian lost:  
craven, we hated them then:  
now we would count them Gods  
beside these, spawn of the earth.*

*Grant us your mantle, Greek!  
grant us but one  
to fright (as your eyes) with a sword,  
men, craven and weak,  
grant us but one to strike  
one blow for you, passionate Greek.*

### I

You would have broken my wings,  
but the very fact that you knew

I had wings, set some seal  
on my bitter heart, my heart  
broke and fluttered and sang.

You would have snared me,  
and scattered the strands of my nest;  
but the very fact that you saw,  
sheltered me, claimed me,  
set me apart from the rest

Of men—of *men*, made you a god,  
and me, claimed me, set me apart  
and the song in my breast,  
yours, yours forever—  
if I escape your evil heart.

2

I loved you:  
men have writ and women have said  
they loved,  
but as the Pythoness stands by the altar,  
intense and may not move,

till the fumes pass over;  
and may not falter or break,  
till the priest has caught the words  
that mar or make  
a deme or a ravaged town;

so I, though my knees tremble,  
my heart break,  
must note the rumbling,  
heed only the shuddering  
down in the fissure beneath the rock  
of the temple floor;

must wait and watch  
and may not turn nor move,  
nor break from my trance to speak  
so slight, so sweet,  
so simple a word as love.

3

What had you done  
had you been true,  
I can not think,  
I may not know.

What could we do  
were I not wise,  
what play invent,  
what joy devise?

What could we do  
if you were great?

(Yet were you lost,  
who were there then,

to circumvent  
the tricks of men?)

What can we do,  
for curious lies  
have filled your heart,  
and in my eyes  
sorrow has writ  
that I am wise.

4

If I had been a boy,  
I would have worshipped your grace.  
I would have flung my worship  
before your feet,  
I would have followed apart,  
glad, rent with an ecstasy  
to watch you turn  
your great head, set on the throat,  
thick, dark with its sinews,  
burned and wrought  
like the olive stalk,  
and the noble chin  
and the throat.

I would have stood,  
and watched and watched  
and burned,

and when in the night,  
from the many hosts, your slaves,  
and warriors and serving men  
you had turned  
to the purple couch and the flame  
of the woman, tall like the cypress tree  
that flames sudden and swift and free  
as with crackle of golden resin  
and cones and the locks flung free  
like the cypress limbs,  
bound, caught and shaken and loosed,  
bound, caught and riven and bound  
and loosened again,  
as in rain of a kingly storm  
or wind full from a desert plain.

So, when you had risen  
from all the lethargy of love and its heat,  
you would have summoned me,  
me alone,  
and found my hands,  
beyond all the hands in the world,  
cold, cold, cold,  
intolerably cold and sweet.

5

It was not chastity that made me cold nor fear;  
only I knew that you, like myself, were sick

of the puny race that crawls and quibbles and lisps  
of love and love and lovers and love's deceit.

It was not chastity that made me wild, but fear  
that my weapon, tempered in different heat,  
was over-matched by yours, and your hand  
skilled to yield death-blows, might break

With the slightest turn—no ill will meant—  
my own lesser, yet still somewhat fine-wrought,  
fiery-tempered, delicate, over-passionate steel.



## AT ELEUSIS

*What they did,  
they did for Dionysos,  
for ecstasy's sake:*

now take the basket,  
think;  
think of the moment you count  
most foul in your life;  
conjure it,  
supplicate,  
pray to it;  
your face is bleak, you retract,  
you dare not remember it:

stop;  
it is too late.

The next stands by the altar step,  
a child's face yet not innocent,  
it will prove adequate, but you,  
I could have spelt your peril at the gate,  
yet for your mind's sake,  
though you could not enter,  
wait.

*What they did,  
they did for 'Dionysos,  
for ecstasy's sake:*

Now take the basket—  
(ah face in a dream,  
did I not know your heart,  
I would falter,  
for each that fares onward  
is my child;  
ah can you wonder  
that my hands shake,  
that my knees tremble,  
I a mortal, set in the goddess' place?)

## FRAGMENT FORTY-ONE

. . . *thou flittest to Andromeda.*

—SAPPHO.

### I

AM I blind alas,

am I blind?

I too have followed  
her path.

I too have bent at her feet.

I too have wakened to pluck  
amaranth in the straight shaft,  
amaranth purple in the cup,  
scorched at the edge to white.

Am I blind?

am I the less ready for her sacrifice?

am I the less eager to give

what she asks,

she the shameless and radiant?

Am I quite lost,

I towering above you and her glance,

walking with swifter pace,  
with clearer sight,  
with intensity  
beside which you two  
are as spent ash?

Nay, I give back to the goddess the gift  
she tendered me in a moment  
of great bounty.  
I return it. I lay it again  
on the white slab of her house,  
the beauty she cast out  
one moment, careless.

Nor do I cry out:  
"why did I stoop?  
why did I turn aside  
one moment from the rocks  
marking the sea-path?  
Aphrodite, shameless and radiant,  
have pity, turn, answer us."

Ah no—though I stumble toward  
her altar-step,  
though my flesh is scorched and rent,  
shattered, cut apart,  
slashed open;  
though my heels press my own wet life  
black, dark to purple,

on the smooth, rose-streaked  
threshold of her pavement.

2

Am I blind alas, deaf too  
that my ears lost all this?  
nay, O my lover,  
shameless and still radiant,  
I tell you this:

I was not asleep,  
I did not lie asleep on those hot rocks  
while you waited.  
I was not unaware when I glanced  
out toward the sea  
watching the purple ships.

I was not blind when I turned.  
I was not indifferent when I strayed aside  
or loitered as we three went  
or seemed to turn a moment from the path  
for that same amaranth.

I was not dull and dead when I fell  
back on our couch at night.  
I was not indifferent when I turned  
and lay quiet.  
I was not dead in my sleep.

Lady of all beauty,  
 I give you this:  
 say I have offered small sacrifice,  
 say I am unworthy your touch,  
 but say not:  
 "she turned to some cold, calm god,  
 silent, pitiful, in preference."

Lady of all beauty,  
 I give you this:  
 say not:  
 "she deserted my altar-step,  
 the fire on my white hearth  
 was too great,  
 she fell back at my first glance."

Lady, radiant and shameless,  
 I have brought small wreaths,  
 (they were a child's gift,)  
 I have offered myrrh-leaf,  
 crisp lentisk,  
 I have laid rose-petal  
 and white rock-rose from the beach.

But I give now a greater,  
 I give life and spirit with this.  
 I render a grace

no one has dared to speak,  
lest men at your altar greet him  
as slave, callous to your art;  
I dare more than the singer  
offering her lute,  
the girl her stained veils,  
the woman her swathes of birth,  
or pencil and chalk,  
mirror and unguent box.

I offer more than the lad  
singing at your steps,  
praise of himself,  
his mirror his friend's face,  
more than any girl,  
I offer you this:  
(grant only strength  
that I withdraw not my gift,)  
I give you my praise and this:  
the love of my lover  
for his mistress.

## TELESILA-

*In Argos—that statue of her;  
at her feet the scroll of her  
love-poetry, in her hand a helmet.*

WAR is a fevered god  
who takes alike  
maiden and king and clod,  
and yet another one,  
(ah withering peril!)  
deprives alike,  
with equal skill,  
alike indifferently,  
hoar spearsman of his shaft,  
wan maiden of her zone,  
even he,  
Love who is great War's  
very over-lord.

War bent  
and kissed the forehead,  
yet Love swift,  
planted on chin  
and tenderest cyclamen lift



of fragrant mouth,  
fevered and honeyed breath,  
breathing o'er and o'er  
those tendrils of her hair,  
soft kisses  
like bright flowers.

Love took  
and laid the sweet,  
(being extravagant,)  
on lip and chin and cheek,  
but, ah, he failed  
even he,  
before the luminous eyes  
that dart  
no suave appeal,  
alas, impelling me  
to brave incontinent,  
grave Pallas' high command.

And yet the mouth!  
ah Love ingratiate,  
how was it you,  
so poignant, swift and sure,  
could not have taken all  
and left me free,  
free to desert the Argives,  
let them burn,  
free yet to turn

and let the city fall:  
yea, let high War  
take all his vengeful way,  
for what am I?  
I cannot save nor stay  
the city's fall.

War is a fevered god,  
(yet who has writ as she  
the power of Love?)  
War bent and kissed the forehead,  
that bright brow,  
ignored the chin  
and the sweet mouth,  
for that and the low laugh were his,  
Eros ingratiate,  
who sadly missed  
in all the kisses count,  
those eyebrows  
and swart eyes,  
O valiant one  
who bowed  
falsely and vilely trapped us  
traitorous lord.

And yet,  
(remembrance mocks,)  
should I have bent the maiden  
to a kiss?

Ares the lover  
or enchanting Love?  
but had I moved  
I feared  
for that astute regard;  
for that bright vision,  
how might I have erred?  
I might have marred and swept  
another not so sweet  
into my exile;  
I might have kept a look  
recalling many and many a woman's look,  
not this alone,  
astute, imperious, proud.

And yet  
I turn and ask  
again, again, again,  
who march to death,  
what was it worth,  
reserve and pride and hurt?  
what is it worth  
to such as I  
who turn to meet  
the invincible Spartans'  
massed and serried host?  
what had it cost, a kiss?

## FRAGMENT SIXTY-EIGHT

*. . . even in the house of Hades.*

—SAPPHO.

### I

I ENVY you your chance of death,  
how I envy you this.

I am more covetous of him  
even than of your glance,  
I wish more from his presence  
though he torture me in a grasp,  
terrible, intense.

Though he clasp me in an embrace  
that is set against my will  
and rack me with his measure,  
effortless yet full of strength,  
and slay me  
in that most horrible contest,  
still, how I envy you your chance.

Though he pierce me—imperious—  
iron—fever—dust—

though beauty is slain  
when I perish,  
I envy you death.

What is beauty to me?  
has she not slain me enough,  
have I not cried in agony of love,  
birth, hate,  
in pride crushed?

What is left after this?  
what can death loose in me  
after your embrace?  
your touch,  
your limbs are more terrible  
to do me hurt.

What can death mar in me  
that you have not?

2

What can death send me  
that you have not?  
you gathered violets,  
you spoke:  
"your hair is not less black,  
nor less fragrant,  
nor in your eyes is less light,

your hair is not less sweet  
with purple in the lift of lock;"  
why were those slight words  
and the violets you gathered  
of such worth?

How I envy you death;  
what could death bring,  
more black, more set with sparks  
to slay, to affright,  
than the memory of those first violets,  
the chance lift of your voice,  
the chance blinding frenzy  
as you bent?

3

So the goddess has slain me  
for your chance smile  
and my scarf unfolding  
as you stooped to it;  
so she trapped me  
with the upward sweep of your arm  
as you lifted the veil,  
and the swift smile and selfless.

Could I have known?  
nay, spare pity,  
though I break,

crushed under the goddess' hate,  
though I fall beaten at last,  
so high have I thrust my glance  
up into her presence.

Do not pity me, spare that,  
but how I envy you  
your chance of death.

## LETHE

NOR skin nor hide nor fleece  
    Shall cover you,  
Nor curtain of crimson nor fine  
Shelter of cedar-wood be over you,  
    Nor the fir-tree  
    Nor the pine.

Nor sight of whin nor gorse  
    Nor river-yew,  
Nor fragrance of flowering bush,  
Nor wailing of reed-bird to waken you,  
    Nor of linnet,  
    Nor of thrush.

Nor word nor touch nor sight ,  
    Of lover, you  
Shall long through the night but for this:  
The roll of the full tide to cover you  
    Without question,  
    Without kiss.



## CHARIOTEER

*In that manner (archaic) he finished the statue of his brother. It stands mid-way in the hall of laurels . . . between the Siphnians' offering and the famous tripod of Naxos.*

ONLY the priest  
of the inmost house  
has such height,  
only the faun  
in the glade  
such light, strong ankles,  
only the shade of the bay-tree  
such rare dark  
as the darkness  
caught under the fillet  
that covers your brow,  
only the blade  
of the ash-tree  
such length, such beauty  
as thou,  
O my brother;  
and only the gods  
have such love

as I bring you;  
but now,  
taut with love,  
more than any bright lover,  
I vowed  
to the innermost  
god of the temple,  
this vow.

God of beauty, I cried,  
as the four stood alert,  
awaiting the shout  
at the goal  
to be off;  
god of beauty,  
I cried to that god,  
if he merit the laurel,  
I dedicate all of my soul  
to you; to you  
all my strength and my power;  
if he merit the bay,  
I will fashion a statue  
of him, of my brother,  
out of thought,  
and the strength of my wrist  
and the fire of my brain;  
I will strive night and day  
till I mould from the clay,  
till I strike from the bronze,

till I conjure the rock,  
the chisel, the tool,  
to embody this image;  
an image to startle,  
to capture men's hearts,  
to make all other bronze,  
all art to come after,  
a mock,  
all beauty to follow,  
a shell that is empty;  
I'll stake all my soul  
on that beauty,  
till God shall awake  
again in men's hearts,  
who have said he is dead,  
our King and our Lover.

Then the start,  
ah the sight,  
ah but dim, veiled with tears,  
(so Achilles must weep  
who finds his friend dead,)  
will he win?  
then the ring of the steel  
as two met at the goal,  
entangled and foul,  
misplaced at the start,  
who, who blunders? not you?  
what omens are set?

alas, gods of the track,  
what ill wreaks its hate,  
speak it clear,  
let me know  
what evil, what fate?  
for the ring of sharp steel  
told two were in peril,  
two, two, one is you,  
already involved  
with the fears of defeat;  
two grazed;  
which must go?

As the wind,  
Althaia's beauty came;  
as one after a cruel march,  
catches sight,  
toward the cold dusk,  
of the flower  
that's her name-sake,  
strayed apart  
toward the road-dust,  
from the stream  
in the wood-depth,  
so I in that darkness,  
my mouth bitter  
with sheer loss,  
took courage,  
my heart spoke,

remembering how she spoke:

“I will seek hour by hour  
fresh cones, resin  
and pine-flowers,  
flower of pine,  
laurel flower;  
I will pray:  
‘let him come  
back to us,  
to our home,  
with the trophy of zeal,  
with the love and the proof  
of the favour of god;  
let him merit the bay.’  
(I expect it,)

I myself on earth pray  
that our father may pray;  
his voice nearer the gods  
must carry beyond  
my mere mortal prayer:  
‘O my father beyond,  
look down and be proud,  
ask this thing  
that we win,  
ask it straight of the gods.’ ”

Was he glad,  
did he know?  
for the strength

of his prayer and her prayer  
met me now  
in one flame,  
all my head, all my brow  
was one flame,  
taut and beaten  
and faintly aglow,  
as the wine-cup  
encrusted and beaten and fine  
with the pattern of leaves,  
(so my brow,)  
yet metallic and cool,  
as the gold of the frigid metal  
that circles the heat  
of the wine.

Then the axel-tree cleft,  
not ours, gods be blest;  
now but three of you left,  
three alert and abreast,  
three—one streak of what fire?,  
three straight for the goal:  
ah defeat,  
ah despair,  
still fate tricked our mares,  
for they swerved,  
flanks quivering and wet,  
as the wind  
at the mid-stretch

caught and fluttered a white scarf;  
a veil shivering,  
only the fluttering  
of a white band,  
yet unnerved and champing,  
they turned,  
(only knowing the swords of *Āchæa*)  
and he, O my love,  
that stranger,  
his stallions  
stark frenzied and black,  
had taken the inmost course,  
overtook,  
overcame,  
overleapt,  
and crowded you back.

O those horses  
we loved and we prized;  
I had gathered *Alea* mint  
and soft branch  
of the vine-stock in flower,  
I had stroked *Elaphia*;  
as one prays to a woman  
"be kind,"  
I had prayed *Daphnaia*;  
I had threatened *Orea*  
for her trick  
of out-pacing the three,

even these,  
I had almost despair'd  
at her fleet, proud pace,  
O the four,  
O swift mares of Achæa.

Should I pray them again?  
or the gods of the track?  
or Althaia at home?  
or our father who died for Achæa?  
or our fathers beyond  
who had vanquished the east?  
should I threaten or pray?

The sun struck the ridge of white marble  
before me:  
white sun on white marble  
was black:  
the day was of ash,  
blind, unrepentant, despoiled,  
my soul cursed the race and the track,  
you had lost.

*You*, lost at the last?

Ah fools,  
so you threatened to win?  
ah fools,  
so you knew my brother?  
Greeks all,



all crafty and feckless,  
even so, had you guessed  
what ran in his veins and mine,  
what blood of Achæa,  
had you dared,  
dared enter the contest,  
dared aspire with the rest?

You had gained,  
you outleapt them;  
a sudden, swift lift of the reins,  
a sudden, swift, taut grip of the reins,  
as suddenly loosed,  
you had gained.

When death comes  
I will see  
no vision of after,  
(as some count  
there may be an hereafter,)  
no thought of old lover,  
no girl, no woman,  
neither mother,  
nor yet my father  
who died for Achæa,  
neither God with the harp  
and the sun on His brow,  
but thou,  
O my brother.

When death comes,  
instead of a vision,  
(I will catch it in bronze)  
you will stand  
as you stood at the end,  
(as the herald announced it,  
proclaiming aloud,  
"Achæa has won,")  
in-reining them now,  
so quiet,  
not turning to answer  
the shout of the crowd.

## THE LOOK-OUT

BETTER the wind, the sea, the salt  
in your eyes,  
than this, this, this.

You grumble and sweat;  
my ears are acute  
to catch your complaint,  
almost the sea's roar is less  
than your constant threat  
of "back and back to the shore,  
and let us rest."

You grumble and curse your luck  
and I hear:  
"O Lynceus,  
aloft by the prow,  
his head on his arms,  
his eyes half closed,  
almost asleep,  
to watch for a rock,  
(and hardly ever we need  
his 'to left' or 'to right')

let Lynceus have my part,  
let me rest like Lynceus."

"Rest like Lynceus!"  
I'd change my fate for yours,  
the very least,  
I'd take an oar with the rest.

"Like Lynceus,"  
as if my lot were the best.

O God, if I could speak,  
if I could taunt the lot  
of the wretched crew,  
with my fate, my work.

But I may not,  
I may not tell  
of the forms that pass and pass,  
of that constant old, old face  
that leaps from each wave  
to wait underneath the boat  
in the hope that at last she's lost.

Could I speak,  
I would tell of great mountains  
that flow, great weeds  
that float and float  
to tangle our oars

if I fail "to left, to right;"  
where the dolphin leaps  
you saw a sign from the god,  
I saw why he leapt from the deep.

"To right, to left;"  
it is easy enough  
to lean on the prow, half asleep,  
and you think,  
"no work for Lynceus."  
No work?

If only you'd let me take an oar,  
if only my back could break with the hurt,  
if the sun could blister my feet,  
pain, pain that I might forget  
the face that just this moment  
passed through the prow  
when you said, "asleep."

Many and many a sight  
if I could speak,  
many and many tales I'd tell,  
many and many a struggle,  
many a death,  
many and many my hurts  
and my pain so great,  
I'd gladly die  
if I did not love the quest.

Grumble and swear and curse,  
brother, god and the boat,  
and the great waves,  
but could you guess  
what strange terror lurks in the sea-depth,  
you'd thank the gods for the ship,  
the timber and giant oars, god-like,  
and the god-like quest.

If you could see as I,  
what lurks in the sea-depth,  
you'd pray to the ropes  
and the solid timbers  
like god, like god;

you'd pray to the oars and your work,  
you'd pray and thank  
the boat for her very self;  
timber and oar and plank  
and sail and the sail-ropes,  
these are beautiful things and great.

But Lynceus at the prow  
has nothing to do but wait  
till we reach a shoal or some rocks  
and then he has only to lift his arms,  
right, left;  
O brother,  
I'd change my place

for the worst seat  
in the cramped bench,  
for an oar, for an hour's toil,  
for sweat and the solid floor.

I'd change my place  
as I sit with eyes half closed,  
if only I could see just the ring  
cut by the boat,  
if only I could see just the water,  
the crest and the broken crest,  
the bit of weed that rises on the crest,  
the dolphin only when he leaps.

But Lynceus,  
though they cannot guess  
the hurt, though they do not thank  
the oars for the dead peace  
of heart and brain worn out,  
you must wait,  
alert, alert, alert.

*From the Masque*

HYACINTH

I

YOUR anger charms me,  
and yet all the time  
I think of chaste, slight hands,  
veined snow;  
snow craters filled  
with first wild-flowerlets;  
glow of ice-gentian,  
whitest violet;  
snow craters  
and the ice ridge  
spilling light;  
dawn and the lover  
chaste dawn leaves bereft—  
I think of these  
and snow-cooled Phrygian wine.

Your anger charms me subtly  
and I know  
that you would take  
the still hands



where I'd rest;  
you would despoil  
for very joy of theft;  
list, lady,  
I would give you one last hint:  
quench your red mouth  
in some cold forest lake,  
cover your russet locks  
with arum leaf,  
quench out the colour,  
still the fevered glance,  
cover your want,  
your fire insatiate,  
I can not match your fervour,  
nay, nor still my ache  
with any  
but white hands inviolate.

2

Take the red spoil  
of grape and pomegranate,  
the red camellia,  
the most, most red rose;  
take all the garden spills,  
inveterate,  
prodigal spender  
just as summer goes,  
the red scales of the deep in-folded spice,

the Indian, Persian and the Syrian pink,  
their scent undaunted  
even in that faint,  
unmistakable fragrance  
of the late tuberose,  
(heavy its petals,  
eye-lids of dark eyes  
that open languorous  
and more languorous close—the east,  
further than scent  
of our wind-smitten isle,)  
take these :

O lady, take them,  
prodigal  
I cull and offer this and this and these  
last definite whorls  
of clustered peonies,  
the last, the first  
that stained our stainless ledge  
of blue and white  
and the white foam of sea,  
rocks,  
and that strait ledge  
whiter than the rock  
the Parians break  
from their enchanted hill;  
take, lady,  
but leave me with my weed and shell

and those slight, hovering gull-wings that  
recall  
silver of far Hymettus' asphodel.

3

Take all  
for you have taken everything,  
but do not let me see you taking this;  
Adonis lying spent with Venus' care,  
Adonis dying were a lesser ache  
than this,  
to have even your slightest breath  
breathe in the crystal air  
where he takes breath.

Take all  
for you have taken everything,  
save the broad ledge of sea  
which no man takes,  
take all  
for you have taken mirth and ease  
and all the small delights  
of simple poets,  
the lilt of rhyme,  
the sway and lift and fall,  
the first spring gold  
your fire has scorched to ash,  
the fresh winds

that go halt  
where you have passed,  
the Tyrian iris  
I so greatly loved,  
its dark head speared  
through its wet spray of leaves.

Take all,  
but ah, lady, a fool, a poet  
may even know when you have taken all:  
up on the mountain slope  
one last flower cleaves  
to the wet marge of ice,  
the blue of snow,  
keep all your riot  
in the swales below,  
of grape and autumn,  
take all, taking these,  
for you and autumn yet  
can not prevail  
against that flame, that flower,  
(ice, spark or jewel,)  
the cyclâmen,  
parting its white cyclamen leaves.

4

O, I am ill with dust  
as you with stain,

O, I am worthless,  
weary, world-bedraggled,  
nevertheless to mountains  
still the rain  
falls on the tangle  
of dead under-brush,  
freshens the loam,  
the earth and broken leaves  
for that hoar-frost  
of later star or flower,  
the fragile host  
of Greek anemones.

Say I am little meet  
to call the youth,  
say I have little magic  
to enchant,  
but is that reason  
why your flaring will  
should sweep and scorch,  
should lap and seethe and fill  
with last red flame  
the tender ditch and runnel  
which the spring freshet  
soon must fill again?

White violets  
have no place  
on your hot brow;

how can I bring you  
what the spring must bring?  
what can I offer?  
lush and heady mallow?  
the fire-grass  
or the serpent-spotted  
fire-flower?  
O take them,  
for I stand a ruinous cloud  
between you  
and the chaste uplifted hill.

O take them swiftly  
and more swiftly go,  
for spring is distant yet,  
for spring is far;  
you have your tense, short space  
of blazing sun,  
your melons, vines,  
your terraces of fruit;  
now all you have,  
all, all I gladly give  
who long but for the ridge,  
the crest and hollow,  
the lift and fall,  
the reach and distant ledge  
of the sun-smitten,  
wind-indented snow.

*The bird-choros of*

ION

BIRDS from Parnassus,  
swift  
you dart  
from the loftiest peaks;  
you hover, dip,  
you sway and perch  
undaunted on the gold-set cornice;  
you eagle,  
god's majestic legate,  
who tear, who strike  
song-birds in mid-flight,  
my arrow whistles toward you,  
swift  
be off;

ah drift,  
ah drift  
so soft, so light,  
your scarlet foot so deftly placed  
to waft you neatly  
to the pavement,

swan, swan  
and do you really think  
your song  
that tunes the harp of Helios,  
will save you  
from the arrow-flight?  
turn back,  
back  
to the lake of Delos;

lest all the song notes  
pause and break  
across a blood-stained throat  
gone songless,  
turn back,  
back  
ere it be too late,  
to wave-swept Delos.

Alas, and still another,  
what?  
you'd place your mean nest  
in the cornice?  
sing, sing  
my arrow-string,  
tell to the thief  
that plaits its house  
for fledglings  
in the god's own house,



that still the Alpheus  
whispers sweet  
to lure  
the birdlets to the place,  
that still the Isthmus  
shines with forests;  
on the white statues  
must be found  
no straw nor litter  
of bird-down,  
Phœbus must have his portal fair;

and yet, O birds,  
though this my labour  
is set,  
though this my task is clear,  
though I must slay you,  
I, god's servant,  
I who take here  
my bread and life  
and sweep the temple,  
still I swear  
that I would save you,  
birds or spirits,  
winged songs  
that tell to men god's will;

still, still  
the Alpheus whispers clear

to lure the bird-folk  
to its waters;  
ah still  
the Isthmus  
blossoms fair;  
lest all the song notes  
pause and break  
across a blood-stained throat  
gone songless,  
turn back,  
back  
ere it be too late,  
to wave-swept Delos.

THE END





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